



CHATHAM COLLEGE LIBRARY



3 1436 00077 0023

823 W21w v.1

Ward, Humphry, 1851-1920.

The writings of Mrs. Humphry
Ward ..

DATE DUE

BORROWER'S NAME

823 W21w v.1

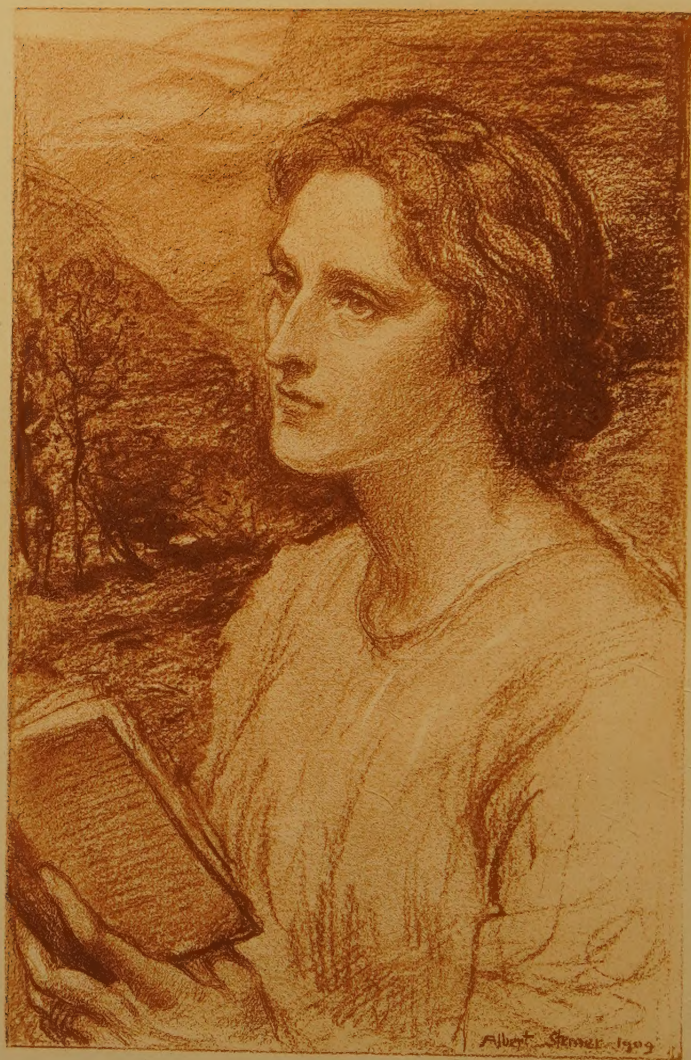
Ward, Humphry, 1851-1920.

The writings of Mrs. Humphry
Ward ..

[illegible]

Westmoreland Edition

THE WRITINGS OF
MRS HUMPHRY WARD
WITH INTRODUCTIONS BY THE AUTHOR
VOLUME I



THE WRITINGS OF
MRS HUMPHRY WARD

ROBERT ELSMERE

VOLUME I



BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
The Riverside Press Cambridge
1911

COPYRIGHT, 1909, BY HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

823
W216m -
v. 1

Dedicated to the Memory

OF

MY TWO FRIENDS

SEPARATED, IN MY THOUGHT OF THEM, BY MUCH DIVERSITY OF
CIRCUMSTANCE AND OPINION;

LINKED IN MY FAITH ABOUT THEM, TO EACH OTHER,

AND TO ALL THE SHINING ONES OF THE PAST,

BY THE LOVE OF GOD AND THE

SERVICE OF MAN:

THOMAS HILL GREEN

(LATE PROFESSOR OF MORAL PHILOSOPHY IN
THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD)

DIED 26TH MARCH, 1882;

AND

LAURA OCTAVIA MARY LYTTTELTON

DIED EASTER EVE, 1886.

NOTE

The quotations given in the present book on page 106 of this volume and pages 65 and 433 of Volume II are either literally or substantially taken from a volume of Lay Sermons, called *The Witness of God*, by the late Professor T. H. Green.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	xiii
BOOK I. WESTMORELAND	1
BOOK II. SURREY	269
BOOK III. THE SQUIRE	451

NOTES ON THE ILLUSTRATIONS

CATHERINE *Frontispiece.*

From an original drawing by Albert Sterner. 'About face and figure there was a delicate austere charm, something that harmonized with the bare stretches and lonely crags of the fells, something that seemed to make a true daughter of the mountains, a partaker at once of their gentleness and their severity.' (Page 13.)

BURWOOD FARM 4

A farm in the Long Sleddale Valley, Westmoreland, which may have suggested the home of the Leyburn family. 'The western light struck full on a copper beech which made a welcome patch of warm colour in front of a long grey line of outhouses, standing level with the house, and touched the heckberry blossoms which marked the upward course of the little lane connecting the old farm with the road; and above it rose the green fell, broken here and there by jutting crags, and below it the ground sank rapidly through a piece of young hazel plantation, at this present moment a sheet of bluebells, toward the level of the river. There was a dainty and yet sober brightness about the whole picture.'

THE VICARAGE OF LONG WHINDALE 28

A Westmoreland vicarage in the Long Sleddale Valley, which answers in some points to the description given in the book. 'The vicarage . . . was a new grey stone building with wooden gables occupying the site of what had once been the early vicarage house of Long Whindale.'

THE CHURCH OF LONG WHINDALE 48

A church in the Long Sleddale Valley, across the road from the vicarage. 'Across the road in front of the Long Whindale parsonage rose a freshly built church; also peaked and gabled, with a spire and two bells and a painted west window, and Heaven knows what novelties besides.' (Page 29.)

INTRODUCTION

I

AFTER twenty-one years 'Robert Elsmere' is now to be reissued as the first instalment of this collected edition. During these years, something, probably, not very far short of a million copies of the work have been distributed in the English-speaking countries, and translations of it have appeared in most foreign languages. Its enemies and its friends agree in attributing to it a certain wide popular influence. It has been much written about, and a good deal preached against. Its circulation is still quite steady; and two years ago—if these details may be allowed me—fifty thousand copies of a new cheap edition were sold in a fortnight, and a hundred thousand within the year. Fifteen years after its publication, M. Brunetière, the editor of the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, and, at the moment, the most important literary supporter of French Catholicism, began a negotiation with me for the appearance of a French translation of the whole or part of the book in the *Revue*; and when I asked him in astonishment how it could possibly suit him to entertain such a project, he replied that whereas in 1888 the ideas expressed in 'Robert Elsmere' could have had no interest for the public of the *Revue*, there was now so much affinity between them and the problems and debates which Modernism had

INTRODUCTION

been forcing on French Catholicism that — always supposing its length could be got over — it had become worth his while to publish it. Its length could not be got over, and the project fell through. But the incident gave the writer of the story a very keen pleasure. For it seemed to show that, with all its many faults, 'Robert Elsmere' had yet possessed a certain representative and pioneering character; and that to some extent at least the generation in which it appeared had spoken through it.

If then it had, or still has, this touch of representative significance, it will perhaps not be thought unseemly on my part if now, looking back twenty-one years, I try to trace some of the half-forgotten circumstances and influences that produced the book. In truth these circumstances and influences — or their natural successors — are still at work in this new century as they were in that which has just closed. 'Modernism' is indeed a far more widespread and active force to-day throughout educated Europe than it was thirty years ago. If in the Church of England, at the present moment, Liberal thought has fewer distinguished and eloquent voices — voices that have the ear of England — than was the case a generation ago, Liberal influence is none the less diffusive, because it has won so many victories that the field of controversy is both changed and narrowed; while the emergence of Modernism in Roman Catholicism is a phenomenon so striking, and represents an advance of critical and historical thought so far-reaching and decisive, that it rightly holds the attention of Europe. If Modernism wins and maintains its right of citizen-

INTRODUCTION

ship within Catholicism, the steady advance of the new Christianity throughout Europe, Catholic or Protestant, is assured; although, for centuries to come, the new and the old may still live and interact side by side. And what is worth notice is that 'Modernism,' in its Catholic form, is a movement starting not from the laity, but from the clergy; it is affecting the central teachings and the accredited teachers of the Church; and its followers are so certain of their ground that they have no idea of leaving the communion they love, and spend their whole energies in reforming it from within. Twenty years ago, in endeavouring to trace the effect of critical thought on an Anglican clergyman, it seemed to me that an honest man in Elsmere's position could only depart and renounce. Fogazzaro, in 'Il Santo,' has with great beauty and force pleaded just the opposite thesis. The Santo does not carry his Modernist denials and affirmations out of the Church; it is the passionate aim of his life of sacrifice and love to naturalise them within it. And the religious novel which still remains to be written for ourselves will take the same ground. The Modernist Anglican parson of the future will not go; the struggle will arise and develop and be fought out within the Church; and only then, through the kindling of that fire, will the Church of England renew its youth, and regain its hold upon the nation.

But in the last third of the nineteenth century the process of thought involved was still so crude and incomplete that it certainly appeared as if there were nothing for an Elsmere but to go. Let me try and show

INTRODUCTION

through a little autobiography how the situation worked.

‘Robert Elsmere’ was begun some time in 1885, finished at the very end of 1887, and published in February, 1888. But if I try to trace back some of the causes which led to its composition, I find myself once more in the heart of that Oxford life, of which some aspects and forces find expression in the early part of the book. From 1872 to 1881, my early married years were spent in the beautiful city to which I came, a child of fourteen, with my parents in 1865, there to find, as I grew up, friends and influences and surroundings which strengthened whatever tendencies to a literary life were natural to one of my name and family tradition. My husband and I married in 1872, and our three children were born before 1880. In the free intervals which the cares of home left me, I got through a good deal of reading and writing of a rather various kind, concerned now with English, now with French, now with Spanish literature; and articles by me appeared in *Macmillan*, the *Saturday Review*, and the *Fortnightly*. But in 1879 all this was merged in a task which occupied me for nearly two years, and was in truth the only piece of serious and consecutive *training*, in both writing and thinking, to which, so far as those years of youth are concerned, I can look back. Dr. Wace, now Dean of Canterbury, came to Oxford to beat up contributors for the second and succeeding volumes of ‘The Dictionary of Christian Biography.’ The first volume — since amended — was thought inadequate and imperfect. It was the ambition of the new editor to se-

INTRODUCTION

cure some historical recruits from Oxford who might help him with the later volumes, especially in the obscurer fields and side-paths connected with the incursion of the northern races into Europe and the break-up of the Roman Empire. Among other additions to his staff, he found in Mr. Arthur Dyke Acland, then historical lecturer at Christchurch and bursar of the College, and afterwards a member of Mr. Gladstone's last Cabinet, a student ready to help him with the Ostrogoths; from Mr. T. R. Buchanan, Fellow of All Souls, and lately Under Secretary for India, he obtained a similar promise with regard to the Franks; and he came to me, on the ground, I imagine, of some articles on Spanish Chronicles contributed by me to the *Saturday Review*, for the West-Goths and Spanish Christianity generally, up to 800 A.D.

Mr. Acland and Mr. Buchanan were soon carried off by politics into wider fields where Franks and Ostrogoths were but as ghosts vanishing at cockcrow. But for me, the two years of labour among the documents of the early Spanish Church and the West-Gothic Kingdom, aided at every step by German criticism and research, were the determining years of life. Practically, I have described them and their effect on the mind in 'Robert Elsmere.' Robert, in the leisure of a country parsonage, sets himself to study the origins of modern France, as the infant state gradually emerged from the wreck or the transformation of the Roman polity. In the chapter describing the Squire's library, Elsmere, for the benefit of Langham, sketches 'the sort of book he thought might be

INTRODUCTION

written on the rise of modern society in Gaul, dwelling first on the outward spectacle of the blood-stained Frankish world as it was, say, in the days of Gregory the Great, on its savage kings, its fiendish women, its bishops and its saints; and then, on the conflict of ideas going on behind all the fierce incoherence of the Empire's decay, the struggle of Roman order and of German freedom, of Roman luxury with German hardness; above all, the war of orthodoxy and heresy with its widespread political complications.' His ambition is 'to grasp and analyse that strange sense which haunts the student of Rome's decline, as it once overshadowed the infancy of Europe, — as of a slowly departing majesty, a great presence just withdrawn and still incalculably potent.' Langham listens to the historical ambitions of his companion, and when Robert has developed them, he interposes with the remark: 'There is one thing that does n't seem to have troubled you yet. You will come to it! It makes almost the chief interest — it is indeed the dominant problem — of history. History depends on *testimony*. What is the nature and the value of testimony at given times? In other words, did the man of the third century understand, or report, or interpret facts in the same way as the man of the sixteenth or the nineteenth? And if not, what are the differences, and what are the deductions to be drawn from them, if any?'

Langham, in fact, asks his friend if, in approaching history, he has ever reflected on the psychology of testimony. Robert replies that he is as yet a beginner. He has been making a general survey of the ground; he must now go to work, inch by inch, and find out

INTRODUCTION

what the ground is made of. The point is of course enormously important. 'I should think it is,' said Langham to himself, as he rose: 'the whole of orthodox Christianity is in it, for instance!'

It was to this conclusion that two years of historical work, dealing at first hand with the chronicles and councils, the treatises and biographies of Spain during the four centuries before Charles the Great, had led the mind of the writer who tried to express herself in 'Robert Elsmere.' The astonishment awakened in Elsmere, as his task develops by those strange processes of mind current in the historians of certain periods, processes which are often more significant and illuminating than the facts which the historians are trying to relate, was in truth my own astonishment. After some fourteen years spent at Oxford in a more or less continuous though always desultory study of English poetry, French *belles-lettres*, and what one may call the general literature of modern religion, the *Acta* of Spanish Councils, and the chronicles and hagiography of the West-Gothic Kingdom, — studied with a certain intensity, — produced in me, beside the immediate historical result, a kind of far-reaching stir and rumination, if one may so put it, which gradually affected the whole mind. And it was this stir and rumination which, six years later, I endeavoured to reproduce in 'Robert Elsmere.'

There were of course other elements in the matter. There was the stimulus of that literary atmosphere supplied by Oxford itself, with its perpetual appeal to the past, and the poetry of the past. And beside

INTRODUCTION

the atmosphere of literature, there was the atmosphere of religious controversy, then far more evident and tangible at Oxford than it is to-day. For us young married people of the early seventies the influence of the great Liberal reaction which had followed the Tractarian Movement was still a living and combative force. Christ Church, from which in my day the harsh and, to us, mysterious figure of Pusey emerged occasionally, to deliver a Jeremiah-like word of warning or appeal from the University pulpit, was the headquarters of orthodoxy; Balliol, with Jowett for its Master, represented the Liberal camp. Through the famous Bampton and his University sermons generally, still more perhaps through an unseen and very able management of affairs, Dr. Liddon had become the champion and leader of the Church forces; while at Balliol, the Master, and still more the beloved tutor and professor, Thomas Hill Green, stood for a constructive Liberalism, the results of which in English religious thought at the present day are, I venture to think, of far greater importance than anything which can be traced to the winning personality and the oratorical gift of Liddon. Then, a stone's throw off, Mark Pattison, at Lincoln College, the sarcastic and often bitter exponent of a type of learning which despised the idealism of Balliol hardly less than the ecclesiasticism of Christ Church, wielded a power, of limited range indeed, but, on those who felt it, of penetrating effect. In the picture of the Squire in 'Robert Elsmere,' those who knew Mark Pattison may have recognised a few of his more obvious traits:

'Mr. Wendover was a man of middle height and

INTRODUCTION

loose bony frame, of which all the lower half had a thin and shrunk look. But the shoulders, which had the scholar's stoop, and the head, were massive and squarely outlined. The head was specially remarkable for its great breadth and comparative flatness above the eyes, and for the way in which the head itself dwarfed the face, which, as contrasted with the large angularity of the skull, was somewhat pinched and drawn. The hair was reddish grey, the eyes small, but deep-set under firm brows, and the thin-lipped wrinkled mouth, the long nose and chin, produced an effect of hard sarcastic strength.'

Such, as I look back, was the outer aspect of Mark Pattison, one of the friends of my youth to whom I have most cause to be grateful. I saw him thus, in the winter evenings, when, as a girl of nineteen, I would sometimes find myself in his library at Lincoln; 'the Rector' on one side of the fire, myself on the other, the cat and the cheerful blaze between. He looked thus as he talked of men and books and University affairs, with a frankness he showed much more readily to women than to men, and to the young rather than to his own contemporaries. He was always interested in the young girl-students of Oxford. He tried to help them, and set a standard before them; and when afterwards that bitter but most impressive fragment of autobiography appeared — one of the 'documents' of University life in the nineteenth century which no after historian will neglect — there were some of us who read it with no mere intellectual interest, but with a sharp pang at heart that our true friend should have suffered so much and so barrenly.

INTRODUCTION

For the rest, 'the Rector' suggested the Squire only so far as outward aspect, a few personal traits, and the two main facts of great learning and a general impatience of fools are concerned. It is difficult to imagine Pattison as a country squire, or in any other setting indeed than college walls; but if he had ever found himself a great landowner, he would not have allowed himself to be managed by his agent; and there would have been no insanitary cottages on his estates.

To return, however, to the Oxford of thirty years ago. In addition to Christ Church, Balliol, and Lincoln, with the literary and philosophical culture for which they stood, there was, of course, Science, camped around the University Museum, in the background. As far as my own personal recollection goes, the men of science entered but little into the struggle of ideas that was going on. The main Darwinian battle had been won long before 1870; science was quietly verifying and exploring along the new lines; it was in literature, history, and theology that evolutionary conceptions were most visibly and dramatically at work. The ever-advancing study of comparative religion, and of the earliest documents and primitive history of Christianity — there lay in truth the chief interest of these years for many minds. When they began, 'Ecce Homo' had just been published; Baur's 'St. Paul,' the 'Vie de Jésus,' and Strauss's 'Neues Leben Jesu' were comparatively new books. Before my husband and I left Oxford in 1881, all Renan's 'Origines' had appeared, so had 'Literature and Dogma' and 'Supernatural Religion'; while Germany had seen the rise of that richer and more varied theo-

INTRODUCTION

logical school of which Harnack has now become throughout Europe the chief representative. Before 1888, the year of 'Robert Elsmere,' this later German school, built on the foundations provided by Strauss and Baur, was at its height, it had captured the great majority of the German universities, and in the Dialogue on 'The New Reformation,' published in January, 1889, which I have reprinted at the end of the second volume of this edition, the effect of its development on English minds may be seen, I think, with some clearness.

Under the constant pressure of this advancing force, which we now see fully developed in 'Modernism,' the orthodoxy of Oxford, in my youth, showed itself naturally impatient and ill at ease. The University pulpit was filled with men endeavouring to fit a not very exacting science to a very grudging orthodoxy. It was not the great debate itself that we heard there, but rather its weakened echoes. Yet the great debate was all round us, and the heat of it was in the Oxford air. It was in the spring of 1881 that the Reverend John Wordsworth, Fellow and Tutor of Brasenose College, as he then was—now the Bishop of Salisbury—preached the Bampton Lectures in St. Mary's. A personal recollection with regard to the first of those Lectures may be given here, as it was in fact to the indignant reaction excited by that sermon in the mind of one of Dr. Wordsworth's hearers that 'Robert Elsmere' may ultimately be traced.

The syllabus of the Lecture had been circulated beforehand. It contained the following: 'The present unsettlement in religion. — Its relation to the move-

INTRODUCTION

ment of civilisation. — Sense of injustice often felt in a time of transition. — Book of Job. — Christ, however, connects unbelief and sin. — Moral causes of unbelief, (1) Prejudice; (2) Severe claims of religion; (3) Intellectual faults, especially indolence, coldness, recklessness, pride, and avarice.' These headings were developed in the sermon itself with a good deal of vigour and rigour. I remember gazing from those dim pews under the gallery, where the Masters' wives sit, at the fine ascetic face of the preacher, with its strong likeness to his great-uncle, the poet of English pantheism; and seeing beside it and around it, in imagination, the forms of those, his colleagues and contemporaries, the patient scholars and thinkers of the Liberal host, whom he was in truth — though perhaps not consciously — attacking. My heart burned within me; and it sprang into my mind that the only way to show England what was in truth going on in its midst, was to try and express it concretely, — in terms of actual life and conduct. Who and what were the persons who had either provoked the present unsettlement of religion, or were suffering under its effects? What was their history? How had their thoughts and doubts come to be? and what was the effect of them on conduct?

It was from this protesting impulse, constantly cherished and strengthened, that, a few years later, 'Robert Elsmere' took its beginning. It found immediate expression, however, in a pamphlet called 'Unbelief and Sin — a Protest addressed to those who attended the Bampton Lecture of Sunday, March 6. 1876.' I wrote it rapidly; it was printed, and put up for

INTRODUCTION

sale in the windows of a well-known bookseller's shop in the High Street. Then an incident, not without its touch of comedy, put a speedy end to its existence. I was then quite inexperienced in the details of publication, and I had not noticed that — no doubt with a shrewd eye to their large clerical *clientèle* — the firm of booksellers concerned had omitted to give any printer's name on the pamphlet. It had only been in the window a few hours, and had been so far selling rapidly, when a well-known High Churchman walked in and asked to look at it. It was handed to him; he turned it over and asked to see one of the partners. The partner appeared; it was pointed out to him that to publish the pamphlet without a printer's name was an illegal act; that it must be at once withdrawn or penalties might be exacted. The frightened booksellers withdrew the pamphlet, and the incident closed — apparently — with a few letters in the *Guardian*. But, as I have already said, the crude pamphlet thus easily suppressed contained the germ of the later book. In it I tried to sketch two types of character, A and B, the one carried by history and criticism into 'unbelief,' — the other gradually stifling in himself the instincts and powers of the free mind; and I endeavoured to show that what the Bampton Lecturer had denounced as 'unbelief' was simply a 'particular way of judging' a series of documents and events belonging to history like any other documents and events; and that 'the Christian problem was first and foremost a literary problem,' and must be handled as such. As to the analysis of the phenomena of unbelief given by the

INTRODUCTION

preacher himself, the little pamphlet asked indignantly, 'Is this all that a religious teacher at the centre of English intellectual activity, whose business it is to make a study of religious thought and of the religious life in man, can tell us about that great movement of the human mind against the traditional Christian theology, which is to many of us the most important fact of our day and age? Does he see no further, does he understand no more than this?'

The note of emotion and complaint in this passage is of the date. The fight was hotter then than now; the older orthodoxy weighed upon England and on the minds of us all, like that consciousness of the Empire on the minds of Goth and Frank — a presence just withdrawn, or withdrawing, and 'still incalculably potent.' The certainties of what Dr. Wordsworth called 'unbelief' are much more certain now than then; and the attitude of the 'believer' towards them has fundamentally changed. Both sides have grown calmer to-day — the one in assertion, the other in denial; and between and beneath the two, the history and criticism, which in 1881 were still in the main a severing and disintegrating force, are now building unseen — perchance — the foundations of a larger unity. The 'unbelief' of the eighties must needs depart and go into exile. 'Robert Elsmere' expresses this point of view. Our empty churches and the ever diminishing hold of the Christian tradition in its older forms are the result of that situation. But Christianity, as a spirit and a life, is imperishable; the loom of Time has woven steadily in these twenty years; and there will be a new birth for the Church of Eng-

INTRODUCTION

land, and a new subject for the 'Dichtung' of the future, whenever English 'Modernism' is at last so sure of itself that instead of going out, it claims resolutely to stay within, and, at the cost perhaps of some decisive conflict, to make good its right and its citizenship within the Church of our fathers.

Meanwhile — beside the grave of George Tyrrell, and envious of the new forces in Catholicism — we wait still for the signs of that greater future.

II

In 1881 my husband and I left beloved Oxford, and settled in London. During the next four years, while my husband wrote for the *Times*, I, having finished with the West-Goths, was busy with reviewing and literary articles, but always with the subject that had first occurred to me in the writing of 'Unbelief and Sin' hovering in the mind. The translation of Amiel's 'Journal Intime,' and the friendship it brought me with M. Edmond Scherer, Amiel's editor,—the gentler embodiment in French criticism of that wide learning, intellectual probity and pessimist philosophy which Oxford respected in Mark Pattison,—showed me something of the working of the 'new learning' in French and Swiss Protestantism. Meanwhile my children and I had made acquaintance with the Surrey Commons. A short tenancy of Peper Harow Vicarage in the summer of 1882 led us to take some rooms in a farmhouse, lost in the heathery and sandy loneliness of Rodborough, the beautiful wild land which stretches along the Portsmouth Road from Milford

INTRODUCTION

to Hindhead. There we passed the summers of six happy years, and partly there, partly in a tiny 'powder-closet' at the back of our old house in Russell Square, — now pulled down, — 'Robert Elsmere' was written.

I began it in 1885. Some old friends with whom we were staying in the North took us one bright spring afternoon for an excursion up the valley of Long Sleddale, which runs up into the southern slopes of the Ullswater Mountains. The main outline of my story was already in my head, and as we drove through the spring leaf and fruit blossom of the bare bright valley, or wandered past the farm at the head, along the stream, and into the desolate hollow of Goat Fell, the figure of Catherine grew plain to me. Westmoreland Fells and Westmoreland Becks had 'haunted me like a passion' since my childhood; I knew Ambleside, Rydal and Grasmere, and many of their inmates, too well indeed to risk the drawing of those classic vales and the peopling of them with mere creatures of imagination; but this valley of Long Sleddale, familiar as Westmoreland ground, and yet strange to me, little known also to the world outside, supplied a setting on which I seized at once. I saw the house where Catherine and her sister lived; the vicarage where Robert stayed; the farm where Mary Backhouse died. To the first rush of imagination it was all plain, and I went home to try and reduce it to writing and form.

The writing of the book took nearly three years. I shrink from saying that, long as it is now, it was at one time far longer! The description of the Squire's

INTRODUCTION

influence on Robert, the conversations on Christian evidence, were originally much fuller. But as the human interest of the story gained upon me I began to shorten these sections of the story, until in the third year, immediately before publication, I desperately reduced them, so far as to give some colour, no doubt, to Mr. Gladstone's reproach, though I cannot but think it exaggerated:

'The book,' says Mr. Gladstone, 'speaks indeed of "the long wrestle" of the two men, and the like. But of Elsmere's wrestling there is no other trace or sign. A great creed, with the testimony of eighteen centuries at its back, cannot find an articulate word to say in its defence.'

Those who dislike the *roman à thèse* will say of course that the dilemma which confronted me is the inevitable dilemma of the propagandist, in all forms of art. Either the art or the thesis suffers. Yet perhaps the degree of injury is determined by the degree of life and significance in the ideas, the debate, involved. At a moment when the particular ideas put forward have a high degree of life and significance for a great many people, the public in a sense coöperates in the book. Such a novel as 'Robert Elsmere' is entirely related to a particular time and *milieu*; and those who are drawn to read it, unconsciously lend it their own thoughts, the passion of their own assents and denials. Some happy chance bestows on a novel this suggestive, symbolic character; and the reader's eager sympathy, or antagonism, completes the effort of the writer.

The last few months before the book came out were months of sorrow and weariness. My mother was dy-

INTRODUCTION

ing of a lingering and tragic illness; and in my anxiety for her, and the fatigue induced by the long struggle of the book, I was entirely despondent of its success. Neither my kind publisher, Mr. George Murray Smith, — wisest and most generous of friends! — nor I expected any large audience. I could not but hope that what had stirred me so deeply to write must find some response at least in minds like my own, accustomed to similar lines of thought. But of a popular success for anything so serious, so controversial and so long I never dreamed. Two persons only, my dear eldest brother, W. T. Arnold, and my old friend Canon Creighton, then Emmanuel Professor at Cambridge, foresaw what really happened.

The book appeared on February 21, 1888. Its success was rapid and decisive. Within a fortnight of its appearance a North-country member of Parliament, a stranger to me, whom I met at Liverpool, told me he had walked over all the ground described in it, in Westmoreland and Surrey. Almost immediately afterwards the rush at Mudie's began, and letters and reviews came pouring in. All through March the interest in it grew; a second edition of the three volumes was soon called for, and a third edition was issued some weeks before Mr. Gladstone's article appeared in the *May Nineteenth Century*. The fate of the novel was never in doubt, and although it would be ungracious and untrue to say that Mr. Gladstone's review—the best piece of literary criticism, I may be allowed to think, he ever wrote—had no effect upon it, it had much less than has been generally supposed.

The hubbub of reviewing, preaching and discussion

INTRODUCTION

that arose about the novel both in England and America, and continued throughout the year, will perhaps be remembered by some of those who read this preface. To one who, though always a writer, had never reached more than a small public, the immense publicity so rapidly attained was naturally exciting and bewildering. Yet it had hardly begun when, between me and it, there was a veil drawn, so that now, as I turn towards those early months, I find myself looking into the face, not of Success, but of Grief; and the voices of praise are lost in those of mourning. My mother died on April 7; on April 15 Matthew Arnold fell dead in a street of Liverpool. My mother's death occurred in the dawn hours of the day on which the *Times* review of 'Robert Elsmere' — the first public recognition perhaps of its phenomenal success — was published; and it was on the way down to my dear uncle's funeral in Laleham Churchyard that Mr. George Smith, his publisher and friend, as he had now become mine, gave me news that would have absorbed me at another moment. But then all personal success seemed a poor, embittered thing; and I knew the meaning of Landor's poignant phrase, — '*that sad word, Joy*'!

Later on, of course, especially when the great American success of the book began, in July and August, I took a natural delight and pride in it all. But in those muffled weeks of April and May, what I remember with most clearness are two conversations with Mr. Gladstone on April 8 and 9, and a few letters that I specially valued from Professor Creighton, Henry James, Walter Pater, and M. Taine. It

INTRODUCTION

was on the Sunday after my mother's death that I met Mr. Gladstone at Keble College. He had read the book, was going to write upon it for the *Nineteenth Century*, and asked that we might have some conversation. I went to Keble; we talked for an hour, and met again on Monday morning for another hour and more. To me a memorable opportunity! For it was the first time that I had seen Mr. Gladstone except in a crowd or on ceremonial occasions, and here we were, discussing the great matters of religion, and the influence of English religious leaders, *tête-à-tête*, in complete freedom and solitude. It was of course a wholly unequal debate. Mr. Gladstone was nearly eighty, I was thirty-seven. Although my husband and I had not been able to follow him, as Liberals, in 1886, and though I had hotly resented what had seemed to me certain grudging and ungenerous elements in his treatment of my uncle, W. E. Forster, during the terrible Land League years of 1880-82, he was yet clothed in my eyes with a halo and an interest, a personal and historic prestige which no leader of the present day seems to possess for his followers. His splendid white head, his well-known features, were for me the symbols of all the great struggles and events of my time; even in opposition, defeat, and old age, he was still the incomparable orator and the formidable statesman. In the following year I was to hear him denounce the Parnell Commission in the House of Commons with all his old mastery and passion; and his last Premiership was still before him. It was impossible that there should be any equal give-and-take between us, even on subjects — such as German

INTRODUCTION

theological criticism — where I might have honestly felt that I had a better right to an opinion than he. I was awed by his personality, and only too glad to listen and follow.¹ Once only, in the second day's conversation, did we really come to close quarters. We had at last arrived at the question of historical evidence on which Elsmere's story turns; and in connexion with, I think, the evidence for the Resurrection, Mr. Gladstone quoted one of the speeches in the Acts. I quickly protested that the speeches in the Acts could only be regarded as indirect evidence; they were clearly not the actual words spoken, and represented rather the views of the redactor of that early document as to what Stephen, or Peter, or Paul would have said, under the given circumstances; a commonplace, of course, of independent New Testament criticism. But the remark roused the sleeping passion of Mr. Gladstone. He became quite pale; his eye flashed; he said something in a deep, thunderous voice about the '*trumpery* objections' of Renan and the Germans; and I withdrew at once. It was as though some great eagle hovered, ready for battle; and feminine courage gave way.

Then, as we said good-bye, standing in the pleasant Oxford drawing-room, Mr. Gladstone said: 'I am an old man, Mrs. Ward! My day is nearly done. But there are still two things that remain for me to do. One is to carry Home Rule! — the other' — he paused a moment, looking at me with his kindling

¹ Among the appendices to the second volume of this edition the reader will find my notes, written on the following afternoon, of the first day's conversation. Unfortunately I have no such record of the second, which was really the more interesting.

INTRODUCTION

eyes — ‘to show the substantial identity between the ancient Hebrew and Olympian revelations!’

I went away, a little bewildered by the suddenness of these last words, but conscious at the same time that nothing could possibly have been more characteristic, more Gladstonian! Characteristic at once of the unabated energy of a marvellous old age, and also, perhaps, of the freedom of an earlier world, before the specialist reigned, when the cultivated mind ‘judged all things’ without fear.

Mr. Gladstone’s article on ‘Robert Elsmere’ appeared in the May number of the *Nineteenth Century*.¹ It was written with a vigour, and at the same time with an old-world courtesy and generosity, which gave it a very wide hearing, and roused in the writer of the book a personal affection and reverence for her reviewer, which remained to me, a happy possession, long after what he himself in a letter to me called ‘our tear-less battle’ was over and done. But, intellectually, I felt that his article must be answered, and although Mr. Jowett, who had all along taken a vivid interest in the success of the novel, came to London on purpose to persuade me to forego reply, and other friends, whose opinion weighed with me greatly, also insisted on the barrenness and futility of controversy in other media, and with other weapons than those I had originally used — the weapons of art and imagination, I clung to my project, and ‘The New Reformation’² appeared in the following January. The dear Master, on reading it, drew a long breath of relief,

¹ Some extracts from it are given in the appendices.

² Printed in the appendices.

INTRODUCTION

and wrote to me that it had 'done no harm,' and showed 'a considerable knowledge of German criticism.' I too felt that it had done no harm; and indeed it gave me a certain admitted right to speak, in the years that followed, not on behalf of scholarship or criticism, in themselves, for that I never dreamed of claiming, but as an interpreter and reporter to the wide lay public of a certain kind of scholarly and historical work, profoundly affecting the thought and action of daily life, and too little known or realised in England.

III

Among the many hundreds of letters which reached me from England and America about 'Robert Elsmere,' I may perhaps be allowed to quote, first, some words of my husband's old friend and mine, Mandell Creighton, whom the wider public knew for four short years as the greatest Bishop of London in our generation, and his own contemporaries and intimates will remember to their last hour, as one of the ablest, subtlest, most vivacious, and most loveable of men. He did not in any way agree with the opinions set forth in the book, and he held that fiction was not the vehicle for their discussion. He had many criticisms to make on the conduct of the story, and the character of Robert; but he gladdened me by saying that 'the view of life as a whole' taken in the novel, 'of the possibilities of the human heart, of the solace given by nature, by art, by companionship — all this is true and just and touching. Moreover, though the subject-

INTRODUCTION

matter of the book is disputable, the fairness of mind which it shows is not disputable. You have tried to enter into manifold views and shades of opinion, and you have sneered at none.' My husband's former colleague at Brasenose, Walter Pater, for whose work I had a passionate admiration, not only wrote an article on 'Robert Elsmere' for the *Guardian* (republished a few years ago), but in a little note that meant a great deal to its recipient, repeated the judgement of the *Guardian* article, that the book was 'a *chef d'œuvre* of quiet observation and feeling'; M. Taine — whom I had met at Oxford in 1871 — sent me the letter which has been printed in his correspondence, and is included in the appendices to this edition; and Mr. Henry James — my friend then, and through nearly thirty years — wrote me some pages of generous praise and admirable criticism, which he allows me to quote here. If to have asked him for leave to reprint them is to convict me of an egotistical and boastful temper, I cannot help it! The pleasure that revives in me, after these many years, as I turn over the pages, brushes other feelings away; and a younger generation that increasingly delights to honour one of the half-dozen masters of fiction in Europe and America that now remain to us will not, I think, read them without interest.

'I owe you an explanation of my long silence about your beautiful book — but I am afraid my explanation will only fill you with deeper contempt for my want of intellectual energy. I have read two volumes of it and then have just had to send the third off to my sister (to follow its predecessor), both because she clamours for it and because I have just instantly to plunge into some very incongruous reading en-

INTRODUCTION

gendered by a promise to write immediately an article on Pierre Loti, and don't want to *touch* "Robert Elsmere" before that is brushed away. I have to re-read the said Pierre from beginning to end, and I don't want to mix the said Robert up with him. Directly this episode is over I shall fall upon your third volume. But I *have* read the first and all but the forty last pages of the second, and I have done so with extreme admiration. The book has great and rare beauty, and interest of a high order: it is, I think, a very distinguished and remarkable production — large and rich and full of the feeling of human life, and of a most refreshing acquaintance (amid the vulgar fashions of the hour) with the things of the mind and the soul. The things you attempt in it are all so interesting; and the intelligence you bring to bear upon them so great — the view so wide — the horizon so full of blue distance and suggestion. The criticism that I should make of you is almost only that your conceptions — so fine as conceptions — are not quite always *representations*, your people not simply enough seen and planted on their feet. But the book abounds in life — and that is the great thing. . . . You have the true view of the interesting novel, that it's a history of our moral life and not simply of our physical accidents. But this is only provisional, and I shall have much more to say to you. I shall return to the charge. The book is immensely suggestive — it dashes from me the mantle of shame in which — in the eyes of Europe — the greater part of current English fiction has lately plunged us."

In a second letter, written some weeks later, Mr. James added:

'I thought you had achieved in your book so many things; and so much reality as well as so much beauty, done so much in effect as well as in intention. The hold you keep of your hero is, I think, very remarkable and especially in relation to the *kind* of hold you constantly attempt to make it: the intimate, lucid, completely perceiving and completely expository point of view. You never touch him but he lives; and much as you tell about him you never kill him with it: though perhaps

INTRODUCTION

one fears a little sometimes that he may suffer a sunstroke, damaging if not fatal, from the high, oblique light of your admiration for him. But fortunately you *see* him as much as you love him, and you feel him as much as you reason him; and your touch goes on animating and your intelligence goes on penetrating, and you do perpetual admirable things in the way of sounding chords, and playing tunes and crossing airs, on fine fibres that would break so easily. Of all that interesting moral realm — the vast dimness of character, of personal history intimate and difficult to write — you take, I think, really masterly possession, and you fiddle there as brilliantly as Rose fiddled in her musical world. The interesting thing to me, in your book (and its great success), as I think I have hinted before, is that you have seen a personal history in the richest and most interesting way — the way that yields most fruit — seen the adventures of the real being, the intensely living inner nature and seen them (rendering them too) so vividly that they become exciting, thrilling, strongly attaching as a “story” and hold one’s curiosity and suspense to the end. You have imagined for Elsmere matters of detail infinitely delicate and fine, both as regards his relations with his wife and as regards all his other fermentation and passion. This will tell you sufficiently what high successes I think both him and Catherine — for Catherine is admirably understood, and so temperately, so unvulgarily painted. You are probably sick of hearing Langham praised; but he is a most interesting vivid study and seen, more than any one else in the book, I think, as the pure *painter* sees his model. He is admirably *drawn* — with his handsome pale head coming out of it — and he turns eventually to such a truthful dusky grey! The three people in the book whom I think, objectively, least completely achieved are the Squire, Rose, and Hugh Flaxman; but, alas, it would take me long to say all the whys and the wherefores! The Squire, one feels, is very elaborately and artistically composed — even full of composite intentions in regard to him, but he does n’t become, to my sense, simple and convincing. He has a symbolic part to play and that interferes — he is too much composed — and the

INTRODUCTION

pieces don't all hang together. I think the same may be said of Mrs. Darcy: all this strikes one as more invented than observed. One would have liked the agent of Elsmere's disintegration to have been attended, somehow, with less machinery, less of the *picturesque* intention, though of course remaining the type most opposed to your hero. And so with Rose — here I am much in the dark — and I don't understand your full intention or quite see *où vous vouliez en venir*. Her general and special representative value — her opposition, her illustration of all the *other* side of life — *à la bonne heure* — I am with you altogether. But *why* — if she is only going *not* to act herself out—

'July 5th. I was violently interrupted two days ago and since then have not had a moment to finish my letter. I almost forget what I was going to say about Rose, — but *voyons un peu*, — yes, I was going to say that if she was only *not* to affirm the full artistic, æsthetic (I don't know what to call it — untheological?) view of life, I don't exactly see why you gave her so much importance. I think you have made too much of her coquetry, her flippancy, impertinence, etc., as if that were a necessary part of her pursuit, her ambition. I can't help wishing that you had made her serious, deeply so, in her own line, as Catherine, for instance, is serious in hers. Then, if she had been strenuous and concentrated, the opposition would have been more real and complete. And I am afraid I don't like her rich, fashionable marriage and find it too conventionally third volume-y. You may say that though rich it is n't "fashionable" in any vulgar sense, and that Flaxman is a very interesting attempt to study conscience in a high place, or at least in a full pocket — to represent a fine characteristic modern case of the sense of responsibilities of wealth, etc. He *is* such an attempt, and *per se* I think him (*per se* in his relation to Elsmere) an excellent figure. But somehow I resent him as the solution of Rose's problem, which a sort of desire for poetic justice in me would have craved to see fought out on lines more characteristic. And Catherine would have been in her own way a more effective figure — a

INTRODUCTION

more pathetic and tragic one — if to bewilderment on the score of her husband's strange, perverse life of the conscience, into which she could n't enter, had been added bewilderment on the score of passions of another order on her sister's part, similarly intense and logical, and equally closed to her. But I am magnifying perhaps — and I only wanted to express a sympathy. The whole book has inspired me with a very great awe, as a large, full picture of life, overflowing with experience, with atmosphere, with multitudinous touches and intentions of a kind I retain. The interest of any novel, in the last analysis, is as a view of the world, and your view is a great sweep on which I congratulate you. Don't answer this, but only tell me, on the 13th, that you have deciphered it.'

IV

Of the characters and composition of the book I have not myself very much to say. In Catherine I tried to embody influences and modes of thought well known to my own youth, though, for the purposes of the story, they had to be embodied in a personality narrower and severer on the intellectual side than any of those dear friends and kinswomen of my own, faithful and self-denying children of the national Church, whose lives and faith inspired the portrait of Catherine. Those whose memory goes back thirty or forty years, who are acquainted, moreover, with the Anglican memoirs and biographies of the mid-nineteenth century, will recognise very easily the sources whence she was drawn; nor, amid the weakened barriers and diffusive debates of our own day, is the type yet as rare as many people suppose. Nothing changes so slowly, in any nation, as the main types of its religious life. The ideas on which they ultimately rest may have been

INTRODUCTION

transformed or cast aside in the general march of the world's thought, but though, for the moment, 'the brains be out' the type survives; until perhaps, in the course of years, the flood of a changed and transfigured thought flows back into the old moulds and channels, and the type itself, through all differences, enters upon a new and vigorous life. I have often thought with regard to the Catherines of the world, *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose!*

In Henry Grey I was of course thinking of the noblest and most persuasive master of philosophic thought in modern Oxford, Thomas Hill Green. The fragment of a Balliol sermon, in the first volume, is taken, as all editions of the book have pointed out, from one of the 'Lay Sermons,' delivered by Mr. Green, as a college tutor, and published after his death. But the character of Grey is in no sense a portrait of T. H. Green. Reality suggested many points in the description, as I was at some pains to admit; but I was writing a novel and not a biographical study, and 'Grey,' after the first few pages, plays a rôle and function wholly relative to the story and conditioned by it. His conversation with Elsmere at the moment of crisis reproduces ideas which are to be found in Mr. Green's writings, but does so in a style and setting which have nothing to do with the living figure. I desired with all my heart to pay a tribute to an influence and a personality which had meant so much to Oxford and to me; but the world of imagination has its own laws and paths, and Grey walks in them; too happy, in his creator's eyes, if at any point he calls to mind that infinitely richer and more potent

INTRODUCTION

life that Oxford knew, thirty years ago, as 'Green of Balliol.'

Langham owes his being entirely to the fact that in 1885, three years before the appearance of 'Robert Elsmere,' I had published a translation of Amiel's 'Journal Intime.' All those who felt with me the spell of that most pathetic and beautiful of the spiritual autobiographies of our day will remember the tragic passages in which Amiel dwells on the 'impossibility of willing,' the paralysis indeed of will power, and the lack of any effective interest in practical life and affairs, which wrecked his own career and quenched his own happiness. It was that impotence and that paralysis of the practical will, under the constant pressure of speculative thought, which, clothed in Oxford conditions and circumstances, I tried to realise anew in the character of Langham. Some of the phrases in the description of him are taken or paraphrased from the 'Journal Intime.' And yet, of course, Langham is no more Amiel than Grey is T. H. Green; as soon as he enters the little world of the novel, action and reaction begin; he shapes others and is shaped by them; and that final barrenness into which he falls has small relation indeed to the sad beauty, the tremulous hope, the dignity and renunciation which make Amiel's last pages so dear to many.

Elsmere himself is a figure of pure imagination, inspired and coloured, as all such figures are, by the actual human experience amid which he was conceived. Of the origins of the Squire I have said as much as I know, and it would not interest the readers of these pages if I were to try and unravel for them the threads

INTRODUCTION

and shreds of reality which went to the weaving of the minor groups and the general background of the story. And of the story itself it is not for me, even at this distance of time, to attempt any general criticism. Its faults are patent. It is the work of one who, in spite of — or perhaps because of — her long immersion in a learned and literary society was in many respects younger than her years, with much of the inexperience, much also of the courageous optimism of youth. From a purely literary point of view the book wants irony and detachment; it is not sufficiently objective and disinterested. Here and there I have been tempted to rewrite a scene which a wider experience of life since it was written might have enabled me to improve. But in the end I have changed little or nothing. The omission of a few paragraphs, the correction of a few redundancies and repetitions — my revision has only amounted to this. For the book belonged to a particular moment both in my own life and in the life of my generation. Whatever merit it has is a merit first and foremost of sincerity, of correspondence to something really felt and seen, the communication of a burning and still recent impression. The feeling of to-day would express itself in other ways and through other methods; but the feeling of yesterday has its own rights, and, if one may so speak, its own sacredness. And is there not a kind of responsibility, also, to those who shared it with us? It was thus the book was written; it was thus it was welcomed, and by many whose eyes are now closed for ever; and for whatever span of life it may still command, it shall go out with the same dress and aspect

INTRODUCTION

as at first. The voices of hope and doubt that speak through it are still breathing over England and Europe, though they speak with other accents and a changed emphasis. Perhaps time and strength may yet be left me in which to try and interpret them afresh.

BOOK I
WESTMORELAND

ROBERT ELSMERE

CHAPTER I

IT was a brilliant afternoon towards the end of May. The spring had been unusually cold and late, and it was evident from the general aspect of the lonely Westmoreland valley of Long Whindale that warmth and sunshine had only just penetrated to its bare green recesses, where the few scattered trees were fast rushing into their full summer dress, while at their feet, and along the bank of the stream, the flowers of March and April still lingered, as though they found it impossible to believe that their rough brother, the east wind, had at last deserted them. The narrow road, which was the only link between the farmhouses sheltered by the crags at the head of the valley and those far-away regions of town and civilisation suggested by the smoke-wreaths of Whinborough on the southern horizon, was lined with masses of the white heckberry or bird-cherry, and ran, an arrowy line of white, through the greenness of the sloping pastures. The sides of some of the little becks running down into the main river and many of the plantations round the farms were gay with the same tree, so that the farmhouses, grey-roofed and grey-walled, standing in the hollows of the fells, seemed here and there to have been robbed of all their natural austerity of aspect, and to be masquerading in a dainty garb of white-and-green imposed upon them by the caprice of the spring.

ROBERT ELSMERE

During the greater part of its course the valley of Long Whindale is tame and featureless. The hills at the lower part are low and rounded, and the sheep and cattle pasture over slopes unbroken either by wood or rock. The fields are bare and close-shaven by the flocks which feed on them; the walls run either perpendicularly in many places up the fells or horizontally along them, so that, save for the wooded course of the tumbling river and the bush-grown hedges of the road, the whole valley looks like a green map divided by regular lines of greyish black. But as the walker penetrates farther, beyond a certain bend which the stream makes halfway from the head of the dale, the hills grow steeper, the breadth between them contracts, the enclosure lines are broken and deflected by rocks and patches of plantation, and the few farms stand more boldly and conspicuously forward, each on its spur of land, looking up to or away from the great masses of frowning crag which close in the head of the valley, and which from the moment they come into sight give it dignity and a wild beauty.

On one of these solitary houses, the afternoon sun, about to descend before very long behind the hills dividing Long Whindale from Shanmoor, was still lingering on this May afternoon we are describing, bringing out the whitewashed porch and the broad bands of white edging the windows into relief against the grey stone of the main fabric, the grey roof overhanging it, and the group of sycamores and Scotch firs which protected it from the cold east and north. The western light struck full on a copper beech, which made a welcome patch of warm colour in front of a long grey line

Burwood Farm



WESTMORELAND

of outhouses standing level with the house, and touched the heckberry blossom which marked the upward course of the little lane connecting the old farm with the road ; above it rose the green fell, broken here and there by jutting crags, and below it the ground sank rapidly through a piece of young hazel plantation, at this present moment a sheet of bluebells, towards the level of the river. There was a dainty and yet sober brightness about the whole picture. Summer in the North is for Nature a time of expansion and of joy as it is elsewhere, but there is none of that opulence, that sudden splendour and superabundance, which mark it in the South. In these bare green valleys there is a sort of delicate austerity even in the summer ; the memory of winter seems to be still lingering about these wind-swept fells, about the farmhouses, with their rough serviceable walls, of the same stone as the crags behind them, and the ravines, in which the shrunken becks trickle musically down through the *débris* of innumerable Decembers. The country is blithe, but soberly blithe. Nature shows herself delightful to man, but there is nothing absorbing or intoxicating about her. Man is still well able to defend himself against her, to live his own independent life of labour and of will, and to develop that tenacity of hidden feeling, that slowly growing intensity of purpose, which is so often wiled out of him by the spells of the South.

The distant aspect of Burwood Farm differed in nothing from that of the few other farmhouses which dotted the fells or clustered beside the river between it and the rocky end of the valley. But as one came

ROBERT ELSMERE

nearer, certain signs of difference became visible. The garden, instead of being the old-fashioned medley of phloxes, lavender bushes, monthly roses, gooseberry trees, herbs, and pampas grass, with which the farmers' wives of Long Whindale loved to fill their little front enclosures, was trimly laid down in turf dotted with neat flower-beds, full at the moment we are writing of with orderly patches of scarlet and purple anemones, wallflowers, and pansies. At the side of the house a new bow-window, modest enough in dimensions and make, had been thrown out on to another close-shaven piece of lawn, and by its suggestion of a distant sophisticated order of things disturbed the homely impression left by the untouched ivy-grown walls, the unpretending porch, and wide slate window-sills of the front. And evidently the line of sheds standing level with the dwelling-house no longer sheltered the animals, the carts, or the tools which make the small capital of a Westmoreland farmer. The windows in them were new, the doors fresh-painted and closely shut; curtains of some soft outlandish make showed themselves in what had once been a stable, and the turf stretched smoothly up to a narrow gravelled path in front of them, unbroken by a single footmark. No, evidently the old farm, for such it undoubtedly was, had been but lately, or comparatively lately, transformed to new and softer uses; that rough patriarchal life of which it had once been a symbol and centre no longer bustled and clattered through it. It had become the shelter of new ideals, the home of another and a milder race than once possessed it.

In a stranger coming upon the house for the first

WESTMORELAND

time, on this particular evening, the sense of a changing social order and a vanishing past produced by the slight but significant modifications it had undergone, would have been greatly quickened by certain sounds which were streaming out on to the evening air from one of the divisions of that long one-storied addition to the main dwelling we have already described. Some indefatigable musician inside was practising the violin with surprising energy and vigour, and within the little garden the distant murmur of the river and the gentle breathing of the west wind round the fell were entirely conquered and banished by these triumphant shakes and turns, or by the flourishes and the broad *cantabile* passages of one of Spohr's Andantes. For a while, as the sun sank lower and lower towards the Shanmoor hills, the hidden artist had it all his, or her, own way; the valley and its green spaces seemed to be possessed by this stream of eddying sound, and no other sign of life broke the grey quiet of the house. But at last, just as the golden ball touched the summit of the craggy fell, which makes the western boundary of the dale at its higher end, the house-door opened, and a young girl, shawled and holding some soft burden in her arms, appeared on the threshold, and stood there for a moment, as though trying the quality of the air outside. Her pause of inspection seemed to satisfy her, for she moved forward, leaving the door open behind her, and, stepping across the lawn, settled herself in a wicker chair under an apple-tree, which had only just shed its blossoms on the turf below. She had hardly done so when one of the distant doors opening on the gravel path flew open, and another maiden, a slim creature

ROBERT ELSMERE

garbed in æsthetic blue, a mass of reddish brown hair flying back from her face, also stepped out into the garden.

‘Agnes!’ cried the new-comer, who had the strenuous and dishevelled air natural to one just emerged from a long violin practice. ‘Has Catherine come back yet?’

‘Not that I know of. Do come here and look at pussie; did you ever see anything so comfortable?’

‘You and she look about equally lazy. What have you been doing all the afternoon?’

‘We look what we are, my dear. Doing? Why, I have been attending to my domestic duties, arranging the flowers, mending my pink dress for to-morrow night, and helping to keep mamma in good spirits; she is depressed because she has been finding Elizabeth out in some waste or other, and I have been preaching to her to make Elizabeth uncomfortable if she likes but not to worrit herself. And after all, pussie and I have come out for a rest. We’ve earned it, have n’t we, Chattie? And, as for you, Miss Artistic, I should like to know what you’ve been doing for the good of your kind since dinner. I suppose you had tea at the vicarage?’

The speaker lifted inquiring eyes to her sister as she spoke, her cheek plunged in the warm fur of a splendid Persian cat, her whole look and voice expressing the very highest degree of quiet, comfort, and self-possession. Agnes Leyburn was not pretty; the lower part of the face was a little heavy in outline and moulding; the teeth were not as they should have been, and the nose was unsatisfactory. But the eyes under their

WESTMORELAND

long lashes were shrewdness itself, and there was an individuality in the voice, a cheery even-temperedness in look and tone, which had a pleasing effect on the bystander. Her dress was neat and dainty; every detail of it bespoke a young woman who respected both herself and the fashion.

Her sister, on the other hand, was guiltless of the smallest trace of fashion. Her skirts were cut with the most engaging *naïveté*, she was much adorned with amber beads, and her red-brown hair had been tortured and frizzled to look as much like an aureole as possible. But, on the other hand, she was a beauty, though at present you felt her a beauty in disguise, a stage Cinderella as it were, in very becoming rags, waiting for the godmother.

‘Yes, I had tea at the vicarage,’ said this young person, throwing herself on the grass in spite of a murmured protest from Agnes, who had an inherent dislike of anything physically rash, ‘and I had the greatest difficulty to get away. Mrs. Thornburgh is in such a flutter about this visit! One would think it was the Bishop and all his Canons, and promotion depending on it, she has baked so many cakes and put out so many dinner napkins! I don’t envy the young man. She will have no wits left at all to entertain him with. I actually wound up by administering some sal-volatile to her.’

‘Well, and after the sal-volatile did you get anything coherent out of her on the subject of the young man?’

‘By degrees,’ said the girl, her eyes twinkling; ‘if one can only remember the thread between whiles

ROBERT ELSMERE

one gets at the facts somehow. In between the death of Mr. Elsmere's father and his going to college, we had, let me see, — the spare-room curtains, the making of them and the cleaning of them, Sarah's idiocy in sticking to her black sheep of a young man, the price of tea when she married, Mr. Thornburgh's singular preference of boiled mutton to roast, the poems she had written to her when she was eighteen, and I can't tell you what else besides. But I held fast, and every now and then I brought her up to the point again, gently, but firmly, and now I think I know all I want to know about the interesting stranger.'

'My ideas about him are not many,' said Agnes, rubbing her cheek gently up and down the purring cat, 'and there does n't seem to be much order in them. He is very accomplished — a teetotaller — he has been to the Holy Land, and his hair has been cut close after a fever. It sounds odd, but I am not curious. I can very well wait till to-morrow evening.'

'Oh, well, as to ideas about a person, one does n't get that sort of thing from Mrs. Thornburgh. But I know how old he is, where he went to college, where his mother lives, a certain number of his mother's peculiarities, which seem to be Irish and curious, where his living is, how much it is worth, likewise the colour of his eyes, as near as Mrs. Thornburgh can get.'

'What a start you have been getting!' said Agnes lazily. 'But what is it makes the poor old thing so excited?'

Rose sat up and began to fling the fir cones lying about her at a distant mark with an energy worthy of

WESTMORELAND

her physical perfections and the æsthetic freedom of her attire.

‘Because, my dear, Mrs. Thornburgh at the present moment is always seeing herself as the conspirator sitting match in hand before a mine. Mr. Elsmere is the match — we are the mine!’

Agnes looked at her sister, and they both laughed, the bright rippling laugh of young women perfectly aware of their own value, and in no hurry to force an estimate of it on the male world.

‘Well,’ said Rose deliberately, her delicate cheek flushed with her gymnastics, her eyes sparkling, ‘there is no saying. “Propinquity does it” — as Mrs. Thornburgh is always reminding us. — But where *can* Catherine be? She went out directly after lunch.’

‘She has gone out to see that youth who hurt his back at the Tysons. At least I heard her talking to mamma about him, and she went out with a basket that looked like beef-tea.’

Rose frowned a little.

‘And I suppose I ought to have been to the school or to see Mrs. Robson, instead of fiddling all the afternoon. I daresay I ought — only, unfortunately, I like my fiddle, and I don’t like stuffy cottages; and as for the goody books, I read them so badly that the old women themselves come down upon me.’

‘I seem to have been making the best of both worlds,’ said Agnes placidly. ‘I have n’t been doing anything I don’t like, but I got hold of that dress she brought home to make for little Emma Payne and nearly finished the skirt, so that I feel as good as one does when one has been twice to church on

ROBERT ELSMERE

a wet Sunday. Ah, there is Catherine, I heard the gate.'

As she spoke steps were heard approaching through the clump of trees which sheltered the little entrance gate, and as Rose sprang to her feet a tall figure in white and grey appeared against the background of the sycamores, and came quickly towards the sisters.

'Dears, I am so sorry; I am afraid you have been waiting for me. But poor Mrs. Tyson wanted me so badly that I could not leave her. She had no one else to help her or to be with her till that eldest girl of hers came home from work.'

'It does n't matter,' said Rose, as Catherine put her arm round her shoulder; 'mamma has n't been fidgeting, and as for Agnes, she looks as if she never wanted to move again.'

Catherine's clear eyes, which at the moment seemed to be full of inward light, kindled in them by some foregoing experience, rested kindly, but only half-consciously, on her youngest sister, as Agnes softly nodded and smiled to her. Evidently she was a good deal older than the other two — she looked about six-and-twenty, a young and vigorous woman in the prime of health and strength. The lines of the form were rather thin and spare, but they were softened by the loose bodice and long full skirt of her dress, and by the folds of a large white muslin handkerchief which was crossed over her breast. The face, sheltered by the plain shady hat, was also a little spoilt from the point of view of beauty by the sharpness of the lines about the chin and mouth, and by a slight prominence of the cheek-bones, but the eyes, of a dark bluish-grey, were fine,

WESTMORELAND

the nose delicately cut, the brow smooth and beautiful, while the complexion had caught the freshness and purity of Westmoreland air and Westmoreland streams. About face and figure there was a delicate austere charm, something which harmonised with the bare stretches and lonely crags of the fells, something which seemed to make her a true daughter of the mountains, partaker at once of their gentleness and their severity. *She* was in her place here, beside the homely Westmoreland house and under the shelter of the fells. When you first saw the other sisters you wondered what strange chance had brought them into that remote sparely-peopled valley; they were plainly exiles, and conscious exiles, from the movement and exhilarations of a fuller social life. But Catherine impressed you as only a refined variety of the local type; you could have found many like her, in a sense, among the sweet-faced serious women of the neighbouring farms.

Now, as she and Rose stood together, her hand still resting lightly on the other's shoulder, a question from Agnes banished the faint smile on her lips, and left only the look of inward illumination, the expression of one who had just passed, as it were, through a strenuous and heroic moment of life, and was still living in the exaltation of memory.

'So the poor fellow is worse?'

'Yes. Doctor Baker, whom they have got to-day, says the spine is hopelessly injured. He may live on paralysed for a few months or longer, but there is no hope of cure.'

Both girls uttered a shocked exclamation. 'That

ROBERT ELSMERE

fine strong young man!’ said Rose under her breath. ‘Does he know?’

‘Yes; when I got there the doctor had just gone, and Mrs. Tyson, who was quite unprepared for anything so dreadful, seemed to have almost lost her wits, poor thing! I found her in the front kitchen with her apron over her head, rocking to and fro, and poor Arthur in the inner room — all alone — waiting in suspense.’

‘And who told him? He has been so hopeful.’

‘I did,’ said Catherine gently; ‘they made me. He *would* know, and she could n’t — she ran out of the room. I never saw anything so pitiful.’

‘Oh, Catherine!’ exclaimed Rose’s moved voice, while Agnes got up, and Chattie jumped softly down from her lap, unheeded.

‘How did he bear it?’

‘Don’t ask me,’ said Catherine, while the quiet tears filled her eyes and her voice broke, as the hidden feeling would have its way. ‘It was terrible! I don’t know how we got through that half-hour — his mother and I. It was like wrestling with some one in agony. At last he was exhausted — he let me say the Lord’s Prayer; I think it soothed him, but one could n’t tell. He seemed half-asleep when I left. Oh!’ she cried, laying her hand in a close grasp on Rose’s arm, ‘if you had seen his eyes, and his poor hands — there was such despair in them! They say, though he was so young, he was thinking of getting married; and he was so steady, such a good son!’

A silence fell upon the three. Catherine stood looking out across the valley towards the sunset. Now that the demand upon her for calmness and fortitude was

WESTMORELAND

removed, and that the religious exaltation in which she had gone through the last three hours was becoming less intense, the pure human pity of the scene she had just witnessed seemed to be gaining upon her. Her lip trembled, and two or three tears silently overflowed. Rose turned and gently kissed her cheek, and Agnes touched her hand caressingly. She smiled at them, for it was not in her nature to let any sign of love pass unheeded, and in a few more seconds she had mastered herself.

‘Dears, we must go in. Is mother in her room? Oh, Rose! in that thin dress on the grass; I ought n’t to have kept you out. It is quite cold by now.’

And she hurried them in, leaving them to superintend the preparations for supper downstairs while she ran up to her mother.

A quarter of an hour afterwards they were all gathered round the supper-table, the windows open to the garden and the May twilight. At Catherine’s right hand sat Mrs. Leyburn, a tall delicate-looking woman, wrapped in a white shawl, about whom there were only three things to be noticed — an amiable temper, a sufficient amount of weak health to excuse her all the more tiresome duties of life, and an incorrigible tendency to sing the praises of her daughters at all times and to all people. The daughters winced under it: Catherine, because it was a positive pain to her to hear herself brought forward and talked about; the others, because youth infinitely prefers to make its own points in its own way. Nothing, however, could mend this defect of Mrs. Leyburn’s. Catherine’s strength of will could keep it in check sometimes, but

ROBERT ELSMERE

in general it had to be borne with. A sharp word would have silenced the mother's well-meant chatter at any time — for she was a fragile, nervous woman, entirely dependent on her surroundings — but none of them were capable of it, and their mere refractoriness counted for nothing.

The dining-room in which they were gathered had a good deal of homely dignity, and was to the Leyburns full of associations. The oak settle near the fire, the oak sideboard running along one side of the room, the black oak table with carved legs at which they sat, were genuine pieces of old Westmoreland work, which had belonged to their grandfather. The heavy carpet covering the stone floor of what twenty years before had been the kitchen of the farmhouse was a survival from a South-country home, which had sheltered their lives for eight happy years. Over the mantelpiece hung the portrait of the girls' father, a long serious face, not unlike Wordsworth's face in outline, and bearing a strong resemblance to Catherine; a line of silhouettes adorned the mantelpiece; on the walls were prints of Winchester and Worcester cathedrals, photographs of Greece, and two old-fashioned engravings of Dante and Milton; while a bookcase, filled apparently with the father's college books and college prizes and the favourite authors — mostly poets, philosophers, and theologians — of his later years, gave a final touch of habitableness to the room. The little meal and its appointments — the eggs, the home-made bread and preserves, the tempting butter and old-fashioned silver gleaming among the flowers which Rose arranged with fanciful skill in Japanese pots of her own provid-

WESTMORELAND

ing — suggested the same family qualities as the room. Frugality, a dainty personal self-respect, a family consciousness, tenacious of its memories and tenderly careful of all the little material objects which were to it the symbols of those memories — clearly all these elements entered into the Leyburn tradition.

And of this tradition, with its implied assertions and denials, Catherine Leyburn, the elder sister, was, of all the persons gathered in this little room, the most pronounced embodiment. She sat at the head of the table, the little basket of her own and her mother's keys beside her. Her dress was a soft black brocade, with lace collar and cuff, which had once belonged to an aunt of her mother's. It was too old for her both in fashion and material, but it gave her a gentle, almost matronly dignity, which became her. Her long thin hands, full of character and delicacy, moved nimbly among the cups; all her ways were quiet and yet decided. It was evident that among this little party she, and not the plaintive mother, was really in authority. To-night, however, her looks were specially soft. The scene she had gone through in the afternoon had left her pale, with traces of patient fatigue round the eyes and mouth, but all her emotion was gone, and she was devoting herself to the others, responding with quick interest and ready smiles to all they had to say, and contributing the little experiences of her own day in return.

Rose sat on her left hand in yet another gown of strange tint and archaic outline. Rose's gowns were legion. They were manufactured by a farmer's daughter across the valley, under her strict and pre-

ROBERT ELSMERE

cise supervision. She was accustomed, as she boldly avowed, to shut herself up at the beginning of each season of the year for two days' meditation on the subject. And now, thanks to the spring warmth, she was entering at last with infinite zest on the results of her April vigils.

Catherine had surveyed her as she entered the room with a smile, but a smile not altogether to Rose's taste.

'What, another, Röschen?' she had said, with the slightest lifting of the eyebrows. 'You never confided that to me. Did you think I was unworthy of anything so artistic?'

'Not at all,' said Rose calmly, seating herself. 'I thought you were better employed.'

But a flush flew over her transparent cheek, and she presently threw an irritated look at Agnes, who had been looking from her to Catherine with amused eyes.

'I met Mr. Thornburgh and Mr. Elsmere driving from the station,' Catherine announced presently; 'at least there was a gentleman in a clerical wideawake, with a portmanteau behind, so I imagine it must have been he.'

'Did he look promising?' inquired Agnes.

'I don't think I noticed,' said Catherine simply, but with a momentary change of expression. The sisters, remembering how she had come in upon them with that look of one 'lifted up,' understood why she had not noticed, and refrained from further questions.

'Well, it is to be hoped the young man is recovered enough to stand Long Whindale festivities,' said Rose.

WESTMORELAND

‘Mrs. Thornburgh means to let them loose on his devoted head to-morrow night.’

‘Who are coming?’ asked Mrs. Leyburn eagerly. The occasional tea-parties of the neighbourhood were an unfailing excitement to her, simply because, by dint of the small adornings, natural to the occasion, they showed her daughters to her under slightly new aspects. To see Catherine, who never took any thought for her appearance, forced to submit to a white dress, a line of pearls round the shapely throat, a flower in the brown hair, put there by Rose’s imperious fingers; to sit in a corner well out of draughts, watching the effect of Rose’s half-fledged beauty, and drinking in the compliments of the neighbourhood on Rose’s playing or Agnes’s conversation, or Catherine’s practical ability — these were Mrs. Leyburn’s passions, and a tea-party always gratified them to the full.

‘Mamma asks as if really she wanted an answer,’ remarked Agnes drily. ‘Dear mother, can’t you by now make up a tea-party at the Thornburghs out of your head?’

‘The Seatons?’ inquired Mrs. Leyburn.

‘Mrs. Seaton and Miss Barks,’ replied Rose. ‘The rector won’t come. And I need n’t say that, having moved heaven and earth to get Mrs. Seaton, Mrs. Thornburgh is now miserable because she has got her. Her ambition is gratified, but she knows that she has spoilt the party. Well, then, Mr. Mayhew, of course, his son, *and* his flute.’

‘You to play his accompaniments?’ put in Agnes sily. Rose’s lip curled.

‘Not if Miss Barks knows it,’ she said emphatically,

ROBERT ELSMERE

‘nor if I know it. The Bakers, of course, ourselves, and the unknown.’

‘Dr. Baker is always pleasant,’ said Mrs. Leyburn, leaning back and drawing her white shawl languidly round her. ‘He told me the other day, Catherine, that if it were n’t for you he should have to retire. He regards you as his junior partner. “Marvellous nursing gift your eldest daughter has, Mrs. Leyburn,” he said to me the other day. A most agreeable man.’

‘I wonder if I shall be able to get any candid opinions out of Mr. Elsmere the day after to-morrow?’ said Rose, musing. ‘It is difficult to avoid having an opinion of some sort about Mrs. Seaton.’

‘Oxford dons don’t gossip, and are never candid,’ remarked Agnes severely.

‘Then Oxford dons must be very dull,’ cried Rose. ‘However,’ and her countenance brightened, ‘if he stays here four weeks we can teach him.’

Catherine, meanwhile, sat watching the two girls with a soft elder sister’s indulgence. Was it in connexion with their bright attractive looks that the thought flitted through her head, ‘I wonder what the young man will be like?’

‘Oh, by the way,’ said Rose presently, ‘I had nearly forgotten Mrs. Thornburgh’s two messages. I informed her, Agnes, that you had given up water-colour and meant to try oils, and she told me to implore you not to, because “water-colour is so *much* more lady-like than oils.” And as for you, Catherine, she sent you a most special message. I was to tell you that she just *loved* the way you had taken to plaiting your hair lately — that it was exactly like the picture of Jeanie

WESTMORELAND

Deans she has in the drawing-room, and that she would never forgive you if you did n't plait it so to-morrow night.'

Catherine flushed faintly as she got up from the table.

'Mrs. Thornburgh has eagle-eyes,' she said, moving away to give her arm to her mother, who looked fondly at her, making some remark in praise of Mrs. Thornburgh's taste.

'Rose!' cried Agnes indignantly, when the other two had disappeared, 'you and Mrs. Thornburgh have not the sense you were born with. What on earth did you say that to Catherine for?'

Rose stared; then her face fell a little.

'I suppose it was foolish,' she admitted. Then she leant her head on one hand and drew meditative patterns on the tablecloth with the other. 'You know, Agnes,' she said presently, looking up, 'there are drawbacks to having a St. Elizabeth for a sister.'

Agnes discreetly made no reply, and Rose was left alone. She sat dreaming a few minutes, the corners of the red mouth drooping. Then she sprang up with a long sigh. 'A little life!' she said half-aloud, 'a little *wickedness*!' and she shook her curly head defiantly.

A few minutes later, in the little drawing-room on the other side of the hall, Catherine and Rose stood together by the open window. For the first time in a lingering spring, the air was soft and balmy; a tender greyness lay over the valley; it was not night, though above the clear outlines of the fell the stars were just twinkling in the pale blue. Far away under the crag on the farther side of High Fell a light was shining.

ROBERT ELSMERE

As Catherine's eyes caught it there was a quick response in the fine Madonna-like face.

'Any news for me from the Backhouses this afternoon?' she asked Rose.

'No, I heard of none. How is she?'

'Dying,' said Catherine simply, and stood a moment looking out. Rose did not interrupt her. She knew that the house from which the light was shining sheltered a tragedy; she guessed with the vagueness of nineteen that it was a tragedy of passion and sin; but Catherine had not been communicative on the subject, and Rose had for some time past set up a dumb resistance to her sister's most characteristic ways of life and thought, which prevented her now from asking questions. She wished nervously to give Catherine's extraordinary moral strength no greater advantage over her than she could help.

Presently, however, Catherine threw her arm round her with a tender protectingness.

'What did you do with yourself all the afternoon, Röschen?'

'I practised for two hours,' said the girl shortly, 'and two hours this morning. My Spohr is nearly perfect.'

'And you did n't look into the school?' asked Catherine, hesitating; 'I know Miss Merry expected you.'

'No, I did n't. When one can play the violin and can't teach, any more than a cockatoo, what's the good of wasting one's time in teaching?'

Catherine did not reply. A minute after Mrs. Leyburn called her, and she went to sit on a stool at her

WESTMORELAND

mother's feet, her hands resting on the elder woman's lap, the whole attitude of the tall active figure one of beautiful and childlike abandonment. Mrs. Leyburn wanted to confide in her about a new cap, and Catherine took up the subject with a zest which kept her mother happy till bedtime.

'Why could n't she take as much interest in my Spohr?' thought Rose.

Late that night, long after she had performed all a maid's offices for her mother, Catherine Leyburn was busy in her own room arranging a large cupboard containing medicines and ordinary medical necessities, a storehouse whence all the simpler emergencies of their end of the valley were supplied. She had put on a white flannel dressing-gown and moved noiselessly about in it, the very embodiment of order, of purity, of quiet energy. The little white-curtained room was bareness and neatness itself. There were a few bookshelves along the walls, holding the books which her father had given her. Over the bed were two enlarged portraits of her parents, and a line of queer little faded monstrosities, representing Rose and Agnes in different stages of childhood. On the table beside the bed was a pile of well-worn books — Keble, Jeremy Taylor, the Bible — connected in the mind of the mistress of the room with the intensest moments of the spiritual life. There was a strip of carpet by the bed, a plain chair or two, a large press; otherwise no furniture that was not absolutely necessary, and no ornaments. And yet, for all its emptiness, the little room in its order and spotlessness had the look and spell of a sanctuary.

ROBERT ELSMERE

When her task was finished Catherine came forward to the infinitesimal dressing-table, and stood a moment before the common cottage looking-glass upon it. The candle behind her showed her the outlines of her head and face in shadow against the white ceiling. Her soft brown hair was plaited high above the broad white brow, giving to it an added stateliness, while it left unmasked the pure lines of the neck. Mrs. Thornburgh and her mother were quite right. Simple as the new arrangement was, it could hardly have been more effective.

But the looking-glass got no smile in return for its information. Catherine Leyburn was young; she was alone; she was being very plainly told that, taken as a whole, she was, or might be at any moment, a beautiful woman. And all her answer was a frown and a quick movement away from the glass. Putting up her hands she began to undo the plaits with haste, almost with impatience; she smoothed the whole mass then set free into the severest order, plaited it closely together, and then, putting out her light, threw herself on her knees beside the window, which was partly open to the starlight and the mountains. The voice of the river far away, wafted from the mist-covered depths of the valley, and the faint rustling of the trees just outside, were for long after the only sounds which broke the silence.

When Catherine appeared at breakfast next morning her hair was plainly gathered into a close knot behind, which had been her way of dressing it since she was thirteen. Agnes threw a quick look at Rose; Mrs. Leyburn, as soon as she had made out through her

WESTMORELAND

spectacles what was the matter, broke into warm expostulations.

‘It is more comfortable, dear mother, and takes much less time,’ said Catherine, reddening.

‘Poor Mrs. Thornburgh!’ remarked Agnes drily.

‘Oh, Rose will make up!’ said Catherine, glancing, not without a spark of mischief in her grey eyes, at Rose’s tortured locks; ‘and mamma’s new cap, which will be superb!’

CHAPTER II

ABOUT four o'clock on the afternoon of the day which was to be marked in the annals of Long Whindale as that of Mrs. Thornburgh's 'high tea,' that lady was seated in the vicarage garden, her spectacles on her nose, a large *couvre-pied* over her knees, and the Whinborough newspaper on her lap. The neighbourhood of this last enabled her to make an intermittent pretence of reading; but in reality the energies of her housewifely mind were taken up with quite other things. The vicar's wife was plunged in a housekeeping experiment of absorbing interest. All her *solid* preparations for the evening were over, and in her own mind she decided that with them there was no possible fault to be found. The cook, Sarah, had gone about her work in a spirit at once lavish and fastidious, breathed into her by her mistress. No better tongue, no plumper chickens, than those which would grace her board to-night were to be found, so Mrs. Thornburgh was persuaded, in the district. And so with everything else of a substantial kind. On this head the hostess felt no anxieties.

But a 'tea' in the North-country depends for distinction, not on its solids or its savouries, but on its sweets. A rural hostess earns her reputation, not by a discriminating eye for butcher's-meat, but by her inventiveness in cakes and custards. And it was just here, with regard to this 'bubble reputation,' that the

WESTMORELAND

vicar's wife of Long Whindale was particularly sensitive. Was she not expecting Mrs. Seaton, the wife of the Rector of Whinborough — odious woman — to tea? Was it not incumbent on her to do well, nay, to do brilliantly, in the eyes of this local magnate? And how was it possible to do brilliantly in this matter with a cook whose recipes were hopelessly old-fashioned, and who had an exasperating belief in the sufficiency of buttered 'whigs' and home-made marmalade for all requirements?

Stung by these thoughts, Mrs. Thornburgh had gone prowling about the neighbouring town of Whinborough till the shop-window of a certain newly-arrived confectioner had been revealed to her, stored with the most airy and appetising trifles — of a make and colouring quite metropolitan. She had flattened her grey curls against the window for one deliberative moment; had then rushed in; and as soon as the carrier's cart of Long Whindale, which she was now anxiously awaiting, should have arrived, bearing with it the produce of that adventure, Mrs. Thornburgh would be a proud woman, prepared to meet a legion of rectors' wives without flinching. Not, indeed, in all respects a woman at peace with herself and the world. In the country, where every household should be self-contained, a certain discredit attaches in every well-regulated mind to 'getting things in.' Mrs. Thornburgh was also nervous at the thought of the bill. It would have to be met gradually out of the weekly money. For 'William' was to know nothing of the matter, except so far as a few magnificent generalities and the testimony of his own dazzled eyes might in-

ROBERT ELSMERE

form him. But after all, in this as in everything else, one must suffer to be distinguished.

The carrier, however, lingered. And at last the drowsiness of the afternoon overcame even those pleasing expectations we have described, and Mrs. Thornburgh's newspaper dropped unheeded to her feet. The vicarage, under the shade of which she was sitting, was a new grey stone building with wooden gables, occupying the site of what had once been the earlier vicarage house of Long Whindale, the primitive dwelling-house of an incumbent, whose chapelry, after sundry augmentations, amounted to just twenty-seven pounds a year. The modern house, though it only contained sufficient accommodation for Mr. and Mrs. Thornburgh, one guest, and two maids, would have seemed palatial to those rustic clerics of the past from whose ministrations the lonely valley had drawn its spiritual sustenance in times gone by. They, indeed, had belonged to another race — a race sprung from the soil and content to spend the whole of life in very close contact and very homely intercourse with their mother earth. Mr. Thornburgh, who had come to the valley only a few years before from a parish in one of the large manufacturing towns, and who had no inherited interest in the Cumbrian folk and their ways, had only a very faint idea, and that a distinctly depreciatory one, of what these mythical predecessors of his, with their strange social status and unbecoming occupations, might be like. But there were one or two old men still lingering in the dale who could have told him a great deal about them, whose memory went back to the days when the relative social

The Vicarage of Long Whindale



WESTMORELAND

importance of the dale parsons was exactly expressed by the characteristic Westmoreland saying: 'Ef ye'll nobbut send us a gude schulemeaster, a verra' moderate parson 'ull dea!' and whose slow minds, therefore, were filled with a strong inarticulate sense of difference as they saw him pass along the road, and recalled the incumbent of their childhood, dropping in for his 'crack' and his glass of 'yale' at this or that farmhouse on any occasion of local festivity, or driving his sheep to Whinborough market with his own hands like any other peasant of the dale.

Within the last twenty years, however, the few remaining survivors of this primitive clerical order in the Westmoreland and Cumberland valleys have dropped into their quiet unremembered graves, and new men of other ways and other modes of speech reign in their stead. And as at Long Whindale, so almost everywhere, the change has been emphasised by the disappearance of the old parsonage houses with their stone floors, their parlours lustrous with oak carving on chest or dresser, and their encircling farm-buildings and meadows, in favour of an upgrowth of new trim mansions designed to meet the needs, not of peasants, but of gentlefolks.

And naturally the churches too have shared in the process of transformation. The ecclesiastical revival of the last half-century has worked its will even in the remotest corners of the Cumbrian country, and soon not a vestige of the homely worshipping-places of an earlier day will remain. Across the road, in front of the long Whindale parsonage, for instance, rose a freshly built church, also peaked and gabled, with

ROBERT ELSMERE

a spire and two bells, and a painted east window, and Heaven knows what novelties besides. The primitive whitewashed structure it replaced had lasted long, and in the course of many generations time had clothed its moss-grown walls, its slated porch, and tombstones worn with rain in a certain beauty of congruity and association, linking it with the purple distances of the fells, and the brawling river bending round the grey enclosure. But finally, after a period of quiet and gradual decay, the ruin of Long Whindale chapel had become a quick and hurrying ruin that would not be arrested. When the rotten timbers of the roof came dropping on the farmers' heads, and the oak benches beneath offered gaps, the geography of which had to be carefully learnt by the substantial persons who sat on them, lest they should be overtaken by undignified disaster; when the rain poured in on the Communion Table and the wind raged through innumerable mortarless chinks, even the slowly-moving folk of the valley came to the conclusion that 'summat 'ull hev to be deun.' And by the help of the Bishop, and Queen Anne's Bounty, and what not, aided by just as many half-crowns as the valley found itself unable to defend against the encroachments of a new and 'molderin' parson, 'summat' was done, whereof the results — namely, the new church, vicarage, and schoolhouse — were now conspicuous.

This radical change, however, had not been the work of Mr. Thornburgh, but of his predecessor, a much more pushing and enterprising man, whose successful efforts to improve the church accommodation in Long Whindale had moved such deep and lasting astonish-

WESTMORELAND

ment in the mind of a somewhat lethargic bishop, that promotion had been readily found for him. Mr. Thornburgh was neither capable of the sturdy begging which had raised the church, nor was he likely on other lines to reach preferment. He and his wife, who possessed much more salience of character than he, were accepted in the dale as belonging to the established order of things. Nobody wished them any harm, and the few people they had specially befriended, naturally, thought well of them.

But the old intimacy of relation which had once subsisted between the clergyman of Long Whindale and his parishioners was wholly gone. They had sunk in the scale; the parson had risen. The old statesmen or peasant proprietors of the valley had for the most part succumbed to various destructive influences, some social, some economical, added to a certain amount of corrosion from within; and their place had been taken by leaseholders, less drunken perhaps, and better educated, but also far less shrewd and individual, and lacking in the rude dignity of their predecessors.

And as the land had lost, the church had gained. The place of the dalesmen knew them no more, but the church and parsonage had got themselves rebuilt, the parson had had his income raised, had let off his glebe to a neighbouring farmer, kept two maids, and drank claret when he drank anything. His flock were friendly enough, and paid their commuted tithes without grumbling. But between them and a perfectly well-meaning but rather dull man, who stood on his dignity, and wore a black coat all the week,

ROBERT ELSMERE

there was no real community. Rejoice in it as we may, in this final passage of Parson Primrose to social regions beyond the ken of Farmer Flamborough, there are some elements of loss as there are in all changes.

Wheels on the road! Mrs. Thornburgh woke up with a start, and stumbling over newspaper and *couvre-pied*, hurried across the lawn as fast as her short squat figure would allow, grey curls and cap-strings flying behind her. She heard a colloquy in the distance in broad Westmoreland dialect, and as she turned the corner of the house she nearly ran into her tall cook, Sarah, whose impassive and saturnine countenance bore traces of unusual excitement.

‘Missis, there’s naw cakes. They’re all left behind on t’ counter at Randall’s. Mr. Backhouse says as how he told old Jim to go fur ’em, and he niver went, and Mr. Backhouse he niver found oot till he’d got past t’ bridge, and than it wur too late to go back.’

Mrs. Thornburgh stood transfixed, something of her fresh pink colour slowly deserting her face as she realised the enormity of the catastrophe. And was it possible that there was the faintest twinkle of grim satisfaction on the face of that elderly minx, Sarah?

Mrs. Thornburgh, however, did not stay to explore the recesses of Sarah’s mind, but ran with little pattering, undignified steps across the front garden and down the steps to where Mr. Backhouse the carrier stood, bracing himself for self-defence.

‘Ya may weel fret, mum,’ said Mr. Backhouse, interrupting the flood of her reproaches, with the comparative *sang-froid* of one who knew that, after all, he was the only carrier on the road, and that the vicar-

WESTMORELAND

age was five miles from the necessities of life; 'it's a bad job, and I's not goin' to say it is n't. But ya jest look 'ere, mum, what's a man to du wi' a daft thing-amy like *that*, as caan't tēak a plain order, and spiles a poor man's business as caan't help hissel'?'

And Mr. Backhouse pointed with withering scorn to a small, shrunken old man, who sat dangling his legs on the shaft of the cart, and whose countenance wore a singular expression of mingled meekness and composure, as his partner flourished an indignant finger towards him.

'Jim,' cried Mrs. Thornburgh reproachfully, 'I did think you would have taken more pains about my order!'

'Yis, mum,' said the old man placidly, 'ya might 'a' thowt it. I's reet sorry, bit ya caan't help these things *sumtimes* — an' it's naw gud a-hollerin' ower 'em like a mad bull. Aa tuke yur bit paper to Randall's and aa laft it wi' 'em to mek up, an' than, aa, weel, aa went to a frind, an' ee *may* hev giv' me a glass of yale, aa doon't say ee *dud* — but ee may, I ween't sweer. Hawsomiver, aa niver thowt naw mair aboot it, nor mair did John, so ee need n't taak — till we wur jest two mile from 'ere. An' ee's a gon' on sence! My! an' a larroping the poor beeast like onything!'

Mrs. Thornburgh stood aghast at the calmness of this audacious recital. As for John, he looked on, surveying his brother's philosophical demeanour at first with speechless wrath, and then with an inscrutable mixture of expressions, in which, however, any one accustomed to his weather-beaten countenance would have probably read a hidden admiration.

ROBERT ELSMERE

‘Weel, aa niver!’ he exclaimed, when Jim’s explanatory remarks had come to an end, swinging himself up on to his seat and gathering up the reins. ‘Yur a boald ’un to tell the missus theer to hur feeace as how ya wur ’tossicatit whan yur owt ta been duing yur larful business. Aa’ve doon wi ’yer. Aa aims to please ma coostomers, an’ aa caan’t abide sek wark. Yur like an oald kneysfe, I can mak’ nowt o’ ya’, nowder back nor edge.’

Mrs. Thornburgh wrung her fat short hands in despair, making little incoherent laments and suggestions as she saw him about to depart, of which John at last gathered the main purport to be that she wished him to go back to Whinborough for her precious parcel.

He shook his head compassionately over the preposterous state of mind betrayed by such a demand, and with a fresh burst of abuse of his brother, and an assurance to the vicar’s wife that he meant to ‘gie that oald man nawtice when he got haum; he was n’t goan to hev his bisness spiled for nowt by an oald ijiot wi’ a hed as full o’ yale as a hayrick ’s full o’ mice,’ he raised his whip and the clattering vehicle moved forward; Jim meanwhile preserving through all his brother’s wrath and Mrs. Thornburgh’s wailings the same mild and even countenance, the meditative and friendly aspect of the philosopher letting the world go ‘as e’en it will.’

So Mrs. Thornburgh was left gasping, watching the progress of the lumbering cart along the bit of road leading to the hamlet at the head of the valley, with so limp and crestfallen an aspect that even the gaunt and secretly jubilant Sarah was moved to pity.

‘Why, missis, we’ll do very well. I’ll hev some

WESTMORELAND

scones in t' oven in naw time, an' theer's finger biscuits, an' wi' buttered toast an' sum o' t' best jams, if they don't hev enuf to eat they ought to.' Then, dropping her voice, she asked with a hurried change of tone, 'Did ye ask un' hoo his daater is?'

Mrs. Thornburgh started. Her pastoral conscience was smitten. She opened the gate and waved violently after the cart. John pulled his horse up, and with a few quick steps she brought herself within speaking, or rather shouting, distance.

'How's your daughter to-day, John?'

The old man's face peering round the oilcloth hood of the cart was darkened by a sudden cloud as he caught the words. His stern lips closed. He muttered something inaudible to Mrs. Thornburgh and whipped up his horse again. The cart started off, and Mrs. Thornburgh was left staring into the receding eyes of 'Jim the Noodle,' who, from his seat on the near shaft, regarded her with a gaze which had passed from benevolence into a preternatural solemnity.

'He's sparin' ov 'is speach is John Backhouse,' said Sarah grimly, as her mistress returned to her. 'Maybe ee's about reet. It's a bad business an' ee'll not mend it wi' taakin'.'

Mrs. Thornburgh, however, could not apply herself to the case of Mary Backhouse. At any other moment it would have excited in her breast the shuddering interest which, owing to certain peculiar attendant circumstances, it awakened in every other woman in Long Whindale. But her mind — such are the limitations of even clergymen's wives — was now absorbed by her own misfortune. Her very cap-strings seemed

ROBERT ELSMERE

to hang limp with depression, as she followed Sarah dejectedly into the kitchen, and gave what attention she could to those second-best arrangements so depressing to the idealist temper.

Poor soul! All the charm and glitter of her little social adventure was gone. When she once more emerged upon the lawn, and languidly readjusted her spectacles, she was weighed down by the thought that in two hours Mrs. Seaton would be upon her. Nothing of this kind ever happened to Mrs. Seaton. The universe obeyed her nod. No carrier conveying goods to her august door ever got drunk or failed to deliver his consignment. The thing was inconceivable. Mrs. Thornburgh was well aware of it.

Should William be informed? Mrs. Thornburgh had a rooted belief in the brutality of husbands in all domestic crises, and would have preferred not to inform him. But she had also a dismal certainty that the secret would burn a hole in her till it was confessed — bill and all. Besides — frightful thought! — would they have to eat up all those *meringues* next day?

Her reflections at last became so depressing that, with a natural epicurean instinct, she tried violently to turn her mind away from them. Luckily she was assisted by a sudden perception of the roof and chimneys of Burwood, the Leyburns' house, peeping above the trees to the left. At sight of them a smile overspread her plump and gently wrinkled face. She fell gradually into a train of thought, as feminine as that in which she had been just indulging, but infinitely more pleasing.

For, with regard to the Leyburns, at this present

WESTMORELAND

moment Mrs. Thornburgh felt herself in the great position of tutelary divinity or guardian angel. At least if divinities and guardian angels do not concern themselves with the questions to which Mrs. Thornburgh's mind was now addressed, it would clearly have been the opinion of the vicar's wife that they ought to do so.

'Who else is there to look after these girls, I should like to know,' Mrs. Thornburgh inquired of herself, 'if I don't do it? As if girls married themselves! People may talk of their independence nowadays as much as they like — it always has to be done for them, one way or another. Mrs. Leyburn, poor lackadaisical thing! is no good whatever. No more is Catherine. They both behave as if husbands tumbled into your mouth for the asking. Catherine's too good for this world — but if she does n't do it, I must. Why, that girl Rose is a beauty — if they did n't let her wear those ridiculous mustard-coloured things, and do her hair fit to frighten the crows! Agnes too — so lady-like and well-mannered; she'd do credit to any man. Well, we shall see, we shall see!'

And Mrs. Thornburgh gently shook her grey curls from side to side, while her eyes, fixed on the open spare-room window, shone with meaning.

'So eligible, too — private means, no encumbrances, and as good as gold.'

She sat lost a moment in a pleasing dream.

'Shall I bring oot the tea to you theer, mum?' called Sarah gruffly, from the garden-door. 'Master and Mr. Elsmere are just coomin' down t' field by t' stepping-stones.'

ROBERT ELSMERE

Mrs. Thornburgh signalled assent and the tea-table was brought. Afternoon tea was by no means a regular institution at the vicarage of Long Whindale, and Sarah never supplied it without signs of protest. But when a guest was in the house Mrs. Thornburgh insisted upon it; her obstinacy in the matter, like her dreams of cakes and confections, being all part of her determination to move with the times, in spite of the station to which Providence had assigned her.

A minute afterwards the vicar, a thick-set grey-haired man of sixty, accompanied by a tall younger man in clerical dress, emerged upon the lawn.

‘Welcome sight!’ cried Mr. Thornburgh; ‘Robert and I have been coveting that tea for the last hour. You guessed very well, Emma, to have it just ready for us.’

‘Oh, that was Sarah. She saw you coming down to the stepping-stones,’ replied his wife, pleased, however, by any mark of appreciation from her mankind, however small. ‘Robert, I hope you have n’t been walked off your legs?’

‘What, in this air, Cousin Emma? I could walk from sunrise to sundown. Let no one call me an invalid any more. Henceforth I am a Hercules.’

And he threw himself on the rug which Mrs. Thornburgh’s motherly providence had spread on the grass for him, with a smile and a look of supreme physical contentment, which did indeed almost efface the signs of recent illness in the ruddy boyish face.

Mrs. Thornburgh studied him; her eye caught first of all by the stubble of reddish hair which, as he took off his hat, stood up straight and stiff all over his head

WESTMORELAND

with an odd wildness and aggressiveness. She involuntarily thought, basing her inward comment on a complexity of reasons — ‘Dear me, what a pity; it spoils his appearance!’

‘I apologise, I apologise, Cousin Emma, once for all,’ said the young man, surprising her glance, and despairingly smoothing down his recalcitrant locks. ‘Let us hope that mountain air will quicken the pace of it before it is necessary for me to present a dignified appearance at Murewell.’

He looked up at her with a merry flash in his grey eyes, and her old face brightened visibly as she realised afresh that in spite of the grotesqueness of his cropped hair, her guest was a most attractive creature. Not that he could boast much in the way of regular good looks: the mouth was large, the nose of no particular outline, and in general the cutting of the face, though strong and characteristic, had a bluntness and *naïveté* like a vigorous unfinished sketch. This bluntness of line, however, was balanced by a great delicacy of tint — the pink-and-white complexion of a girl, indeed — enhanced by the bright reddish hair, and quick grey eyes.

The figure was also a little out of drawing, so to speak; it was tall and loosely-jointed. The general impression was one of agility and power. But if you looked closer you saw that the shoulders were narrow, the arms inordinately long, and the extremities too small for the general height. Robert Elsmere’s hand was the hand of a woman, and few people ever exchanged a first greeting with its very tall owner without a little shock of surprise.

ROBERT ELSMERE

Mr. Thornburgh and his guest had visited a few houses in the course of their walk, and the vicar plunged for a minute or two into some conversation about local matters with his wife. But Mrs. Thornburgh, it was soon evident, was giving him but a scatterbrained attention. Her secret was working in her ample breast. Very soon she could contain it no longer, and breaking in upon her husband's parish news, she tumbled it all out pell-mell, with a mixture of discomfiture and defiance infinitely diverting. She could not keep a secret, but she also could not bear to give William an advantage.

William certainly took his advantage. He did what his wife in her irritation had precisely foreseen that he would do. He first stared, then fell into a guffaw of laughter, and as soon as he had recovered breath, into a series of unfeeling comments which drove Mrs. Thornburgh to desperation.

'If you will set your mind, my dear, on things we plain folks can do perfectly well without' — *et cetera*, *et cetera* — the husband's point of view can be imagined. Mrs. Thornburgh could have shaken her good man, especially as there was nothing new to her in his remarks; she had known to a T beforehand exactly what he would say. She took up her knitting in a great hurry, the needles clicking angrily, her grey curls quivering under the energy of her hands and arms, while she launched at her husband various retorts as to his lack of consideration for her efforts and her inconvenience, which were only very slightly modified by the presence of a stranger.

Robert Elsmere meanwhile lay on the grass, his

WESTMORELAND

face discreetly turned away, an uncontrollable smile twitching the corners of his mouth. Everything was fresh and piquant up here in this remote corner of the North-country, whether the mountain air or the wind-blown streams, or the manners and customs of the inhabitants. His cousin's wife, in spite of her ambitious conventionalities, was really the child of Nature to a refreshing degree. One does not see these types, he said to himself, in the cultivated monotony of Oxford or London. She was like a bit of a bygone world — Miss Austen's or Miss Ferrier's — unearthed for his amusement. He could not for the life of him help taking the scenes of this remote rural existence, which was quite new to him, as though they were the scenes of some comedy of manners.

Presently, however, the vicar became aware that the passage of arms between himself and his spouse was becoming just a little indecorous. He got up with a 'Hem!' intended to put an end to it, and deposited his cup.

'Well, my dear, have it as you please. It all comes of your determination to have Mrs. Seaton. Why could n't you just ask the Leyburns and let us enjoy ourselves?'

With this final shaft he departed to see that Jane, the little maid whom Sarah ordered about, had not, in cleaning the study for the evening's festivities, put his last sermon into the waste-paper basket. His wife looked after him with eyes that spoke unutterable things.

'You would never think,' she said in an agitated voice to young Elsmere, 'that I had consulted Mr. Thorn-

ROBERT ELSMERE

burgh as to every invitation, that he entirely agreed with me that one *must* be civil to Mrs. Seaton, considering that she can make anybody's life a burden to them about here that is n't; but it's no use.'

And she fell back on her knitting with redoubled energy, her face full of a half-tearful intensity of meaning. Robert Elsmere restrained a strong inclination to laugh, and set himself instead to distract and console her. He expressed sympathy with her difficulties, he talked to her about her party, he got from her the names and histories of the guests. How Miss Austenish it sounded: the managing rector's wife, her still more managing old maid of a sister, the neighbouring clergyman who played the flute, the local doctor, and a pretty daughter just out — 'Very pretty,' sighed Mrs. Thornburgh, who was now depressed all round, 'but all flounces and frills and nothing to say' — and last of all, those three sisters, the Leyburns, who seemed to be on a different level, and whom he had heard mentioned so often since his arrival by both husband and wife.

'Tell me about the Miss Leyburns,' he said presently. 'You and Cousin William seem to have a great affection for them. Do they live near?'

'Oh, quite close,' cried Mrs. Thornburgh, brightening at last, and like a great general, leaving one scheme in ruins, only the more ardently to take up another. 'There is the house,' and she pointed out Burwood among its trees. Then with her eye eagerly fixed upon him, she fell into a more or less incoherent account of her favourites. She laid on her colours thickly, and Elsmere at once assumed extravagance.

WESTMORELAND

‘A saint, a beauty, and a wit all to yourselves in these wilds!’ he said, laughing. ‘What luck! But what on earth brought them here—a widow and three daughters—from the South? It was an odd settlement surely, though you have one of the loveliest valleys and the purest airs in England.’

‘Oh, as to lovely valleys,’ said Mrs. Thornburgh, sighing, ‘I think it very dull; I always have. When one has to depend for everything on a carrier that gets drunk, too! Why, you know they belong here. They’re real Westmoreland people.’

‘What does that mean exactly?’

‘Oh, their grandfather was a farmer, just like one of the common farmers about. Only his land was his own, and theirs is n’t.’

‘He was one of the last of the statesmen,’ interposed Mr. Thornburgh—who, having rescued his sermon from Jane’s tender mercies, and put out his modest claret and sherry for the evening, had strolled out again and found himself impelled as usual to put some precision into his wife’s statements—‘one of the small freeholders who have almost disappeared here as elsewhere. The story of the Leyburns always seems to me typical of many things.’

Robert looked inquiry, and the vicar, sitting down—having first picked up his wife’s ball of wool as a peace-offering, which was loftily accepted—launched into a narrative which may be here somewhat condensed.

The Leyburns’ grandfather, it appeared, had been a typical North-country peasant—honest, with strong passions both of love and hate, thinking nothing of

ROBERT ELSMERE

knocking down his wife with the poker, and frugal in all things save drink. Drink, however, was ultimately his ruin, as it was the ruin of most of the Cumberland statesmen. 'The people about here,' said the vicar, 'say he drank away an acre a year. He had some fifty acres, and it took about thirty years to beggar him.'

Meanwhile, this brutal, rollicking, strong-natured person had sons and daughters — plenty of them. Most of them, even the daughters, were brutal and rollicking too. Of one of the daughters, now dead, it was reported that, having on one occasion discovered her father, then an old infirm man, sitting calmly by the fire beside the prostrate form of his wife, whom he had just felled with his crutch, she had taken off her wooden shoe and given her father a clout on the head, which left his grey hair streaming with blood; after which she had calmly put the horse into the cart, and driven off to fetch the doctor to both her parents. But among this grim and earthy crew there was one exception, a 'hop out of kin,' of whom all the rest made sport. This was the second son, Richard, who showed such a persistent tendency to 'book-larnin',' and such a persistent idiocy in all matters pertaining to the land, that nothing was left to the father at last but to send him with many oaths to the grammar-school at Whinborough. From the moment the boy got a footing in the school he hardly cost his father another penny. He got a local bursary which paid his school expenses, he never missed a remove or failed to gain a prize, and finally won a close scholarship which carried him triumphantly to Queen's College.

His family watched his progress with a gaping,

WESTMORELAND

half-contemptuous amazement, till he announced himself as safely installed at Oxford, having borrowed from a Whinborough patron the modest sum necessary to pay his college valuation — a sum which wild horses could not have dragged out of his father, now sunk over head and ears in debt and drink.

From that moment they practically lost sight of him. He sent the class list which contained his name among the Firsts to his father; in the same way he communicated the news of his Fellowship at Queen's, his ordination and his appointment to the headmastership of a South-country grammar-school. None of his communications were ever answered till, in the very last year of his father's life, the eldest son, who had a shrewder eye all round to the main chance than the rest, applied to 'Dick' for cash wherewith to meet some of the family necessities. The money was promptly sent, together with photographs of Dick's wife and children. These last were not taken much notice of. These Leyburns were a hard, limited, incurious set, and they no longer regarded Dick as one of themselves.

'Then came the old man's death,' said Mr. Thornburgh. 'It happened the year after I took the living. Richard Leyburn was sent for and came. I never saw such a scene in my life as the funeral supper. It was kept up in the old style. Three of Leyburn's sons were there: two of them farmers like himself, one a clerk from Manchester, a daughter married to a tradesman in Whinborough, a brother of the old man, who was under the table before supper was half over, and so on. Richard Leyburn wrote to ask me to

ROBERT ELSMERE

come, and I went to support his cloth. But I was new to the place,' said the vicar, flushing a little, 'and they belonged to a race that had never been used to pay much respect to parsons. To see that man among the rest! He was thin and dignified; he looked to me as if he had all the learning imaginable, and he had large, absent-looking eyes, which, as George, the eldest brother, said, gave you the impression of some one that "had lost somethin' when he was nobbut a lad, and had gone seekin' it iver sence." He was formidable to me; but between us we could n't keep the rest of the party in order, so when the orgie had gone on a certain time, we left it and went out into the air. It was an August night. I remember Leyburn threw back his head and drank it in. "I have n't breathed this air for five-and-twenty years," he said. "I thought I hated the place, and in spite of that drunken crew in there, it draws me to it like a magnet. I feel, after all, that I have the fells in my blood." He was a curious man, a refined-looking melancholy creature, with a face that reminded you of Wordsworth, and cold donnish ways, except to his children and the poor. I always thought his life had disappointed him somehow.'

'Yet one would think,' said Robert, opening his eyes, 'that he had made a very considerable success of it!'

'Well, I don't know how it was,' said the vicar, whose analysis of character never went very far. 'Anyhow, next day he went peering about the place and the mountains and the lands his father had lost. And George, the eldest brother, who had inherited

WESTMORELAND

the farm, watched him without a word, in the way these Westmoreland folk have, and at last offered him what remained of the place for a fancy price. I told him it was a preposterous sum, but he would n't bargain. "I shall bring my wife and children here in the holidays," he said, "and the money will set George up in California." So he paid through the nose, and got possession of the old house, in which, I should think, he had passed about as miserable a childhood as it was possible to pass. There's no accounting for tastes.'

'And then the next summer they all came down,' interrupted Mrs. Thornburgh. She disliked a long story as she disliked being read aloud to. 'Catherine was fifteen, not a bit like a child. You used to see her everywhere with her father. To my mind he was always exciting her brain too much, but he was a man you could not say a word to. I don't care what William says about his being like Wordsworth; he just gave you the blues to look at.'

'It was so strange,' said the vicar meditatively, 'to see them in that house. If you knew the things that used to go on there in old days — the savages that lived there. And then to see those three delicately brought-up children going in and out of the parlour where old Leyburn used to sit smoking and drinking; and Dick Leyburn walking about in a white tie, and the same men touching their hats to him who had belaboured him when he was a boy at the village school — it was queer.'

'A curious little bit of social history,' said Elsmere. 'Well, and then he died and the family lived on?'

'Yes, he died the year after he bought the place.'

ROBERT ELSMERE

And perhaps the most interesting thing of all has been the development of his eldest daughter. She has watched over her mother, she has brought up her sisters; but much more than that: she has become a sort of Deborah in these valleys,' said the vicar, smiling. 'I don't count for much, she counts for a great deal. I can't get the people to tell me their secrets, she can. There is a sort of natural sympathy between them and her. She nurses them, she scolds them, she preaches to them, and they take it from her when they won't take it from us. Perhaps it is the feeling of blood. Perhaps they think it as mysterious a dispensation of Providence as I do that that brutal, swearing, whiskey-drinking stock should have ended in anything so saintly and so beautiful as Catherine Leyburn.'

The quiet, commonplace clergyman spoke with a sudden tremor of feeling. His wife, however, looked at him with a dissatisfied expression.

'You always talk,' she said, 'as if there were no one but Catherine. People generally like the other two much better. Catherine is so stand-off.'

'Oh, the other two are very well,' said the vicar, but in a different tone.

Robert sat ruminating. Presently his host and hostess went in, and the young man went sauntering up the climbing garden-path to the point where only a railing divided it from the fellside. From here his eye commanded the whole of the upper end of the valley — a bare, desolate recess filled with evening shadow, and walled round by masses of grey and purple crag, except in one spot, where a green intervening fell

The Church of Long Whindale



WESTMORELAND

marked the course of the pass connecting the dale with the Ullswater district. Below him were church and parsonage; beyond, the stone-filled babbling river, edged by intensely green fields, which melted imperceptibly into the browner stretches of the opposite mountain. Most of the scene, except where the hills at the end rose highest and shut out the sun, was bathed in quiet light. The white patches on the farm-houses, the heckberry trees along the river and the road, caught and emphasised the golden rays which were flooding into the lower valley as into a broad green cup. Close by, in the little vicarage orchard, were fruit trees in blossom; the air was mild and fragrant, though to the young man from the warmer South there was still a bracing quality in the soft western breeze which blew about him.

He stood there bathed in silent enchantment, an eager nature going out to meet and absorb into itself the beauty and peace of the scene. Lines of Wordsworth were on his lips; the little well-worn volume was in his pocket, but he did not need to bring it out; and his voice had all a poet's intensity of emphasis as he strolled along, reciting under his breath —

‘It is a beauteous evening, calm and free,
The holy time is quiet as a nun
Breathless with adoration!’

Presently his eye was once more caught by the roof of Burwood, lying beneath him on its promontory of land, in the quiet shelter of its protecting trees. He stopped, and a delicate sense of harmonious association awoke in him. That girl, atoning as it were by her one white life for all the crimes and coarseness of her

ROBERT ELSMERE

ancestry: the idea of her seemed to steal into the solemn golden evening and give it added poetry and meaning. The young man felt a sudden strong curiosity to see her.

CHAPTER III

THE festal tea had begun, and Mrs. Thornburgh was presiding. Opposite to her, on the vicar's left, sat the formidable rector's wife. Poor Mrs. Thornburgh had said to herself as she entered the room on the arm of Mr. Mayhew, the incumbent of the neighbouring valley of Shanmoor, that the first *coup d'œil* was good. The flowers had been arranged in the afternoon by Rose; Sarah's exertions had made the silver shine again; a pleasing odour of good food underlay the scent of the bluebells and fern; and what with the snowy table-linen, and the pretty dresses and bright faces of the younger people, the room seemed to be full of an incessant play of crisp and delicate colour.

But just as the vicar's wife was sinking into her seat with a little sigh of wearied satisfaction, she caught sight suddenly of an eye-glass at the other end of the table slowly revolving in a large and jewelled hand. The judicial eye behind the eye-glass travelled round the table, lingering, as it seemed to Mrs. Thornburgh's excited consciousness, on every spot where cream or jelly or *meringue* should have been and was not. When it dropped with a harsh little click, the hostess, unable to restrain herself, rushed into desperate conversation with Mr. Mayhew, giving vent to incoherences in the course of the first act of the meal which did but confirm her neighbour — a grim, uncommunicative person — in his own devotion to a policy of silence.

ROBERT ELSMERE

Meanwhile the vicar was grappling on very unequal terms with Mrs. Seaton. Mrs. Leyburn had fallen to young Elsmere. Catherine Leyburn was paired off with Dr. Baker, Agnes with Mr. Mayhew's awkward son — a tongue-tied youth, lately an unattached student at Oxford, but now relegated, owing to an invincible antipathy to Greek verbs, to his native air, till some other opening into the great world should be discovered for him.

Rose was on Robert Elsmere's right. Agnes had coaxed her into a white dress as being the least startling garment she possessed, and she was like a Stot-hard picture with her high waist, her blue sash ribbon, her slender neck and brilliant head. She had already cast many curious glances at the Thornburghs' guest. 'Not a prig, at any rate,' she thought to herself with satisfaction, 'so Agnes is quite wrong.'

As for the young man, who was, to begin with, in that state which so often follows on the long confinement of illness, when the light seems brighter and scents keener and experience sharper than at other times, he was inwardly confessing that Mrs. Thornburgh had not been romancing. The vivid creature at his elbow, with her still unsoftened angles and movements, was in the first dawn of an exceptional beauty; the plain sister had struck him before supper in the course of twenty minutes' conversation as above the average in point of manners and talk. As to Miss Leyburn, he had so far only exchanged a bow with her, but he was watching her now, as he sat opposite to her, out of his quick observant eyes.

She, too, was in white. As she turned to speak to

WESTMORELAND

the youth at her side, Elsmere caught the fine outline of the head, the unusually clear and perfect moulding of the brow, nose, and upper lip. The hollows in the cheeks struck him, and the way in which the breadth of the forehead somewhat overbalanced the delicacy of the mouth and chin. The face, though still quite young, and expressing a perfect physical health, had the look of having been polished and refined away to its foundations. There was not an ounce of superfluous flesh on it, and not a vestige of Rose's peach-like bloom. Her profile, as he saw it now, had the firmness, the clear whiteness, of a profile on a Greek gem.

She was actually making that silent, awkward lad talk! Robert, who, out of his four years' experience as an Oxford tutor, had an abundant compassion for and understanding of such beings as young Mayhew, watched her with a pleased amusement, wondering how she did it. What? Had she got him on carpentering, engineering—discovered his weak point? Water-wheels, inventors, steam-engines—and the lumpish lad all in a glow, talking away nineteen to the dozen. What tact, what kindness in her grey-blue eyes!

But he was interrupted by Mrs. Seaton, who was perfectly well aware that she had beside her a stranger of some prestige, an Oxford man, and a member, besides, of a well-known Sussex county family. She was a large and commanding person, clad in black *moiré* silk. She wore a velvet diadem, Honiton lace lappets, and a variety of chains, beads, and bangles, bestrewn about her that made a tinkling as she moved. Fixing her neighbour with a bland majesty of eye, she in-

ROBERT ELSMERE

quired of him if he were 'any relation of Sir Mowbray Elsmere?' Robert replied that Sir Mowbray Elsmere was his father's cousin, and the patron of the living to which he had just been appointed. Mrs. Seaton then graciously informed him that long ago — 'when I was a girl in my native Hampshire' — her family and Sir Mowbray Elsmere had been on intimate terms. Her father had been devoted to Sir Mowbray. 'And I,' she added, with an evident though lofty desire to please, 'retain an inherited respect, sir, for your name.'

Robert bowed, but it was not clear from his look that the rector's wife had made an impression. His general conception of his relative and patron Sir Mowbray — who had been for many years the family black sheep — was, indeed, so far removed from any notions of 'respect,' that he had some difficulty in keeping his countenance under the lady's look and pose. He would have been still more entertained had he known the nature of the intimacy to which she referred. Mrs. Seaton's father, in his capacity of solicitor in a small country town, had acted as electioneering agent for Sir Mowbray (then plain Mr.) Elsmere on two occasions — in 18—, when his client had been triumphantly returned at a bye-election; and two years later, when a repetition of the tactics, so successful in the previous contest, led to a petition, and to the disappearance of the heir to the Elsmere property from parliamentary life.

Of these matters, however, he was ignorant, and Mrs. Seaton did not enlighten him. Drawing herself up a little, and proceeding in a more neutral tone than

WESTMORELAND

before, she proceeded to put him through a catechism on Oxford, alternately cross-examining him and expounding to him her own views and her husband's on the functions of universities. She and the Archdeacon conceived that the Oxford authorities were mainly occupied in ruining the young men's health by over-examination, and poisoning their minds by free-thinking opinions. In her belief, if it went on, the mothers of England would refuse to send their sons to these ancient but deadly resorts. She looked at him sternly as she spoke, as though defying him to be flippant in return. And he, indeed, did his polite best to be serious.

But it somewhat disconcerted him in the middle to find Miss Leyburn's eyes upon him. And undeniably there was a spark of laughter in them, quenched, as soon as his glance crossed hers, under long lashes. How that spark had lit up the grave, pale face! He longed to provoke it again, to cross over to her and say, 'What amused you? Do you think me very young and simple? Tell me about these people.'

But, instead, he made friends with Rose. Mrs. Seaton was soon engaged in giving the vicar advice on his parochial affairs, an experience which generally ended by the appearance of certain truculent elements in one of the mildest of men. So Robert was free to turn to his girl neighbour and ask her what people meant by calling the Lakes rainy.

'I understand it is pouring at Oxford. To-day your sky here has been without a cloud, and your rivers are running dry.'

'And you have mastered our climate in twenty-four

ROBERT ELSMERE

hours, like the tourists — is n't it? — that do the Irish question in three weeks?'

'Not the answer of a bread-and-butter miss,' he thought to himself, amused, 'and yet what a child it looks.'

He threw himself into a war of words with her, and enjoyed it extremely. Her brilliant colouring, her gestures as fresh and untamed as the movements of the leaping river outside, the mixture in her of girlish pertness and ignorance with the promise of a remarkable general capacity, made her a most taking, provoking creature. Mrs. Thornburgh — much recovered in mind since Dr. Baker had praised the pancakes by which Sarah had sought to prove to her mistress the superfluity of naughtiness involved in her recourse to foreign cooks — watched the young man and maiden with a face which grew more and more radiant. The conversation in the garden had not pleased her. Why should people always talk of Catherine! Mrs. Thornburgh stood in awe of Catherine and had given her up in despair. It was the other two whose fortunes, as possibly directed by her, filled her maternal heart with sympathetic emotion.

Suddenly in the midst of her satisfaction she had a rude shock. What on earth was the vicar doing? After they had got through better than any one could have hoped, thanks to a discreet silence and Sarah's makeshifts, there was the master of the house pouring the whole tale of his wife's aspirations and disappointment into Mrs. Seaton's ear! If it were ever allowable to rush upon your husband at table and stop his mouth with a dinner napkin, Mrs. Thornburgh could

WESTMORELAND

at this moment have performed such a feat. She nodded and coughed and fidgeted in vain!

The vicar's confidences were the result of a fit of nervous exasperation. Mrs. Seaton had just embarked upon an account of 'our charming time with Lord Fleckwood.' Now Lord Fleckwood was a distant cousin of Archdeacon Seaton, and the great magnate of the neighbourhood, not, however, a very respectable magnate. Mr. Thornburgh had heard accounts of Lupton Castle from Mrs. Seaton on at least half a dozen different occasions. Privately he believed them all to refer to one visit, an event of immemorial antiquity periodically brought up to date by Mrs. Seaton's imagination. But the vicar was a timid man, without the courage of his opinions, and in his eagerness to stop the flow of his neighbour's eloquence he could think of no better device, or more suitable rival subject, than to plunge into the story of the drunken carrier, and the pastry still reposing on the counter at Randall's.

He blushed, good man, when he was well in it. His wife's horrified countenance embarrassed him. But anything was better than Lord Fleckwood. Mrs. Seaton listened to him with the slightest smile on her formidable lip. The story was pleasing to her.

'At least, my dear sir,' she said when he paused, nodding her diademed head with stately emphasis, 'Mrs. Thornburgh's inconvenience may have one good result. You can now make an example of the carrier. It is our special business, as my husband always says, who are in authority, to bring their low vices home to these people.'

ROBERT ELSMERE

The vicar fidgeted in his chair. What ineptitude had he been guilty of now! By way of avoiding Lord Fleckwood he might have started Mrs. Seaton on teetotalism. Now if there was one topic on which this awe-inspiring woman was more awe-inspiring than another it was on the topic of teetotalism. The vicar had already felt himself a criminal as he drank his modest glass of claret under her eye.

‘Oh, the drunkenness about here is pretty bad,’ said Dr. Baker, from the other end of the table. ‘But there are plenty of worse things in these valleys. Besides, what person in his senses would think of trying to disestablish John Backhouse? He and his queer brother are as much a feature of the valley as High Fell. We have too few originals left to be so very particular about trifles.’

‘Trifles?’ repeated Mrs. Seaton in a deep voice, throwing up her eyes. But she would not venture an argument with Dr. Baker. He had all the cheery self-confidence of the old established local doctor, who knows himself to be a power, and neither Mrs. Seaton nor her restless intriguing little husband had ever yet succeeded in putting him down.

‘You must see these two old characters,’ said Dr. Baker to Elsmere across the table. ‘They are relics of a Westmoreland which will soon have disappeared. Old John, who is going on for seventy, is as tough an old dalesman as ever you saw. He does n’t measure his cups, but he would scorn to be floored by them. I don’t believe he does drink much, but if he does, there is probably no amount of whiskey that he could n’t carry. Jim, the other brother, is about five years older.

WESTMORELAND

He is a kind of softie — all alive on one side of his brain, and a noodle on the other. A single glass of rum-and-water puts him under the table. And as he never can refuse this glass, and as the temptation generally seizes him when they are on their rounds, he is always getting John into disgrace. John swears at him and slangs him. No use. Jim sits still, looks — well, nohow. I never saw an old creature with a more singular gift of denuding his face of all expression. John vows he shall go to the “house”; he has no legal share in the business; the house and the horse and cart are John’s. Next day you see them on the cart again just as usual. In reality neither brother can do without the other. And three days after, the play begins again.’

‘An improving spectacle for the valley,’ said Mrs. Seaton drily.

‘Oh, my dear madam,’ said the doctor, shrugging his shoulders, ‘we can’t all be so virtuous. If old Jim is a drunkard, he has got a heart of his own somewhere, and can nurse a dying niece like a woman. Miss Leyburn can tell us something about that.’

And he turned round to his neighbour with a complete change of expression, and a voice that had a new note in it of affectionate respect. Catherine coloured as if she did not like being addressed on the subject, and just nodded a little with gentle affirmative eyes.

‘A strange case,’ said Dr. Baker, again looking at Elsmere. ‘It is a family that is original and old-world even in its ways of dying. I have been a doctor in these parts for five-and-twenty years. I have seen

ROBERT ELSMERE

what you may call old Westmoreland die out—costume, dialect, superstitions. At least, as to dialect, the people have become bi-lingual. I sometimes think they talk it to each other as much as ever, but some of them won't talk it to you and me at all. And as to superstitions, the only ghost-story I know that still has some hold on popular belief is the one which attaches to this mountain here, High Fell, at the end of this valley.'

He paused a moment. A salutary sense has begun to penetrate even modern provincial society, that no man may tell a ghost-story without leave. Rose threw a merry glance at him. They two were very old friends. Dr. Baker had pulled out her first teeth and given her a sixpence afterwards for each operation. The pull was soon forgotten; the sixpence lived on gratefully in a child's warm memory.

'Tell it,' she said; 'we give you leave. We won't interrupt you unless you put in too many inventions.'

'You invite me to break the first law of story-telling, Miss Rose,' said the doctor, lifting a finger at her. 'Every man is bound to leave a story better than he found it. However, I could n't tell it if I would. I don't know what makes the poor ghost walk; and if you do, I shall say you invent. But at any rate there is a ghost, and she walks along the side of High Fell at midnight every Midsummer Day. If you see her and she passes you in silence, why you only get a fright for your pains. But if she speaks to you, you die within the year. Old John Backhouse is a widower with one daughter. This girl saw the ghost last Midsummer Day, and Miss Leyburn and I are now doing

WESTMORELAND

our best to keep her alive over the next ; but with very small prospect of success.'

'What is the girl dying of? — fright?' asked Mrs. Seaton harshly.

'Oh no!' said the doctor hastily, 'not precisely. A sad story ; better not inquire into it. But at the present moment the time of her death seems likely to be determined by the strength of her own and other people's belief in the ghost's summons.'

Mrs. Seaton's grim mouth relaxed into an ungenial smile. She put up her eye-glass and looked at Catherine. 'An unpleasant household, I should imagine,' she said, shortly, 'for a young lady to visit.'

Dr. Baker looked at the rector's wife, and a kind of flame came into his eyes. He and Mrs. Seaton were old enemies, and he was a quick-tempered mercurial sort of man.

'I presume that one's guardian angel may have to follow one sometimes into unpleasant quarters,' he said hotly. 'If this girl lives, it will be Miss Leyburn's doing ; if she dies, saved and comforted, instead of lost in this world and the next, it will be Miss Leyburn's doing too. Ah, my dear young lady, let me alone! You tie my tongue always, and I won't have it.'

And the doctor turned his weather-beaten elderly face upon her with a look which was half defiance and half apology. She, on her side, had flushed painfully, laying her white finger-tips imploringly on his arm. Mrs. Seaton turned away with a little dry cough, so did her spectacled sister at the other end of the table. Mrs. Leyburn, on the other hand, sat in a little ecstasy, looking at Catherine and Dr. Baker, something glisten-

ROBERT ELSMERE

ing in her eyes. Robert Elsmere alone showed presence of mind. Bending across to Dr. Baker, he asked him a sudden question as to the history of a certain strange green mound or barrow that rose out of a flat field not far from the vicarage windows. Dr. Baker grasped his whiskers, threw the young man a queer glance, and replied. Thenceforward he and Robert kept up a lively antiquarian talk on the traces of Norse settlement in the Cumbrian valleys, which lasted till the ladies left the dining-room.

As Catherine Leyburn went out Elsmere stood holding the door open. She could not help raising her eyes upon him, eyes full of a half-timid, half-grateful friendliness. His own returned her look with interest.

“A spirit, but a woman too,” he thought to himself with a new-born thrill of sympathy, as he went back to his seat. She had not yet said a direct word to him, and yet he was curiously convinced that here was one of the most interesting persons, and one of the persons most interesting to *him*, that he had ever met. What mingled delicacy and strength in the hand that had lain beside her on the dinner-table — what potential depths of feeling in the full dark-fringed eye!

Half an hour later, when Elsmere re-entered the drawing-room, he found Catherine Leyburn sitting by an open French window that looked out on the lawn, and on the dim rocky face of the fell. Adeline Baker, a stooping red-armed maiden, with a pretty face, set off, as she imagined, by a vast amount of cheap finery, was sitting beside her, studying her with a timid adoration. The doctor's daughter regarded Catherine Ley-

WESTMORELAND

burn, who during the last five years had made herself almost as distinct a figure in the popular imagination of a few Westmoreland valleys as Sister Dora among her Walsall miners, as a being of a totally different order from herself. She was glued to the side of her idol, but her shy and awkward tongue could find hardly anything to say to her. Catherine, however, talked away, gently stroking the while the girl's rough hand which lay on her knee, to the mingled pain and bliss of its owner, who was outraged by the contrast between her own ungainly member and Miss Leyburn's delicate fingers.

Mrs. Seaton was on the sofa beside Mrs. Thornburgh, amply avenging herself on the vicar's wife for any checks she might have received at tea. Miss Barks, her sister, an old maid with a face that seemed to be perpetually peering forward, light colourless hair surmounted by a cap adorned with artificial nasturtiums, and white-lashed eyes armed with spectacles, was having her way with Mrs. Leyburn, inquiring into the household arrangements of Burwood with a cross-examining power which made the mild widow as pulp before her.

When the gentlemen entered, Mrs. Thornburgh looked round hastily. She herself had opened that door into the garden. A garden on a warm summer night offers opportunities no schemer should neglect. Agnes and Rose were chattering and laughing on the gravel path just outside it, their white girlish figures showing temptingly against the dusky background of garden and fell. It somewhat disappointed the vicar's wife to see her tall guest take a chair and draw it be-

ROBERT ELSMERE

side Catherine — while Adeline Baker awkwardly got up and disappeared into the garden.

Elsmere felt it an unusually interesting moment, so strong had been his sense of attraction at tea ; but like the rest of us he could find nothing more telling to start with than a remark about the weather. Catherine in her reply asked him if he were quite recovered from the attack of low fever he was understood to have been suffering from.

‘Oh yes,’ he said brightly, ‘I am very nearly as fit as I ever was, and more eager than I ever was to get to work. The idling of it is the worst part of illness. However, in a month from now I must be at my living, and I can only hope it will give me enough to do.’

Catherine looked up at him with a quick impulse of liking. What an eager face it was! Eagerness, indeed, seemed to be the note of the whole man, of the quick eyes and mouth, the flexible hands and energetic movements. Even the straight, stubbly hair, its owner’s passing torment, standing up round the high open brow, seemed to help the general impression of alertness and vigour.

‘Your mother, I hear, is already there?’ said Catherine.

‘Yes. My poor mother!’ and the young man smiled half-sadly. ‘It is a curious situation for both of us. This living which has just been bestowed on me is my father’s old living. It is in the gift of my cousin, Sir Mowbray Elsmere. My great-uncle’ — he drew himself together suddenly. ‘But I don’t know why I should imagine that these things interest other peo-

WESTMORELAND

ple,' he said, with a little quick, almost comical, accent of self-rebuke.

'Please go on,' cried Catherine hastily. The voice and manner were singularly pleasant to her; she wished he would not interrupt himself for nothing.

'Really? Well then, my great-uncle, old Sir William, wished me to have it when I grew up. I was against it for a long time; took orders; but I wanted something more stirring than a country parish. One has dreams of many things. But one's dreams come to nothing. I got ill at Oxford. The doctors forbade the town work. The old incumbent who had held the living since my father's death died precisely at that moment. I felt myself booked, and gave in to various friends; but it is second best.'

She felt a certain soreness and discomfort in his tone, as though his talk represented a good deal of mental struggle in the past.

'But the country is not idleness,' she said, smiling at him. Her cheek was leaning lightly on her hand, her eyes had an unusual animation; and her long white dress, guiltless of any ornament save a small old-fashioned locket hanging from a thin old chain and a pair of hair bracelets with engraved gold clasps, gave her the nobleness and simplicity of a Romney picture.

'*You* do not find it so, I imagine,' he replied, bending forward to her with a charming gesture of homage. He would have liked her to talk to him of her work and her interests. He, too, mentally compared her to Saint Elizabeth. He could almost have fancied the dark red flowers in her white lap. But his comparison had another basis of feeling than Rose's.

ROBERT ELSMERE

However, she would not talk to him of herself. The way in which she turned the conversation brought home to his own expansive confiding nature a certain austerity and stiffness of fibre in her which for the moment chilled him. But as he got her into talk about the neighbourhood, the people and their ways, the impression vanished again, so far at least as there was anything repellent about it. Austerity, strength, individuality, all these words indeed he was more and more driven to apply to her. She was like no other woman he had ever seen. It was not at all that she was more remarkable intellectually. Every now and then, indeed, as their talk flowed on, he noticed in what she said an absence of a good many interests and attainments which in his ordinary South-country women friends he would have assumed as a matter of course.

‘I understand French very little, and I never read any,’ she said to him once, quietly, as he fell to comparing some peasant story she had told him with an episode in one of George Sand’s Berry novels. It seemed to him that she knew her Wordsworth by heart. And her own mountain life, her own rich and meditative soul, had taught her judgements and comments on her favourite poet which stirred Elsmere every now and then to enthusiasm — so true they were and pregnant, so full often of a natural magic of expression. On the other hand, when he quoted a very well-known line of Shelley’s she asked him where it came from. She seemed to him deeper and simpler at every moment; her very limitations of sympathy and knowledge, and they were evidently many, began

WESTMORELAND

to attract him. The thought of her ancestry crossed him now and then, rousing in him now wonder, and now a strange sense of congruity and harmony. Clearly she was the daughter of a primitive unexhausted race. And yet what purity, what refinement, what delicate perception and self-restraint!

Presently they fell on the subject of Oxford.

‘Were you ever there?’ he asked her.

‘Once,’ she said. ‘I went with my father one summer term. I have only a confused memory of it — of the quadrangles, and a long street, a great building with a dome, and such beautiful trees!’

‘Did your father often go back?’

‘No; never toward the latter part of his life’ — and her clear eyes clouded a little; ‘nothing made him so sad as the thought of Oxford.’

She paused, as though she had strayed on to a topic where expression was a little difficult. Then his face and clerical dress seemed somehow to reassure her, and she began again, though reluctantly.

‘He used to say that it was all so changed. The young fellows he saw when he went back scorned everything he cared for. Every visit to Oxford was like a stab to him. It seemed to him as if the place was full of men who only wanted to destroy and break down everything that was sacred to him.’

Elsmere reflected that Richard Leyburn must have left Oxford about the beginning of the Liberal reaction, which followed Tractarianism, and in twenty years transformed the University.

‘Ah!’ he said, smiling gently. ‘He should have lived a little longer. There is another turn of the tide since

ROBERT ELSMERE

then. The destructive wave has spent itself, and at Oxford now many of us feel ourselves on the upward swell of a religious revival.'

Catherine looked up at him with a sweet sympathetic look. That dim vision of Oxford, with its grey, tree-lined walls, lay very near to her heart for her father's sake. And the keen face above her seemed to satisfy and respond to her inner feeling.

'I know the High Church influence is very strong,' she said, hesitating; 'but I don't know whether father would have liked that much better.'

The last words had slipped out of her, and she checked herself suddenly. Robert saw that she was uncertain as to his opinions, and afraid lest she might have said something discourteous.

'It is not only the High Church influence,' he said quickly, 'it is a mixture of influences from all sorts of quarters that has brought about the new state of things. Some of the factors in the change were hardly Christian at all, by name, but they have all helped to make men think, to stir their hearts, to win them back to the old ways.'

His voice had taken to itself a singular magnetism. Evidently the matters they were discussing were matters in which he felt a deep and loving interest. His young boyish face had grown grave; there was a striking dignity and weight in his look and manner, which suddenly roused in Catherine the sense that she was speaking to a man of distinction, accustomed to deal on equal terms with the large things of life. She raised her eyes to him for a moment, and he saw in them a beautiful, mystical light — responsive, lofty, full of soul.

WESTMORELAND

The next moment, it apparently struck her sharply that their conversation was becoming incongruous with its surroundings. Behind them Mrs. Thornburgh was bustling about with candles and music-stools, preparing for a performance on the flute by Mr. Mayhew, the black-browed vicar of Shanmoor, and the room seemed to be pervaded by Mrs. Seaton's strident voice. Her strong natural reserve asserted itself, and her face settled again into the slight rigidity of expression characteristic of it. She rose and prepared to move farther into the room.

'We must listen,' she said to him, smiling, over her shoulder.

And she left him, settling herself by the side of Mrs. Leyburn. He had a momentary sense of rebuff. The man, quick, sensitive, sympathetic, felt in the woman the presence of a strength, a self-sufficingness which was not all attractive. His vanity, if he had cherished any during their conversation, was not flattered by its close. But as he leant against the window-frame waiting for the music to begin, he could hardly keep his eyes from her. He was a man who, by force of temperament, made friends readily with women, though except for a passing fancy or two he had never been in love; and his sense of difficulty with regard to this stiffly-mannered, deep-eyed country girl brought with it an unusual stimulus and excitement.

Miss Barks seated herself deliberately, after much fiddling with bracelets and gloves, and tied back the ends of her cap behind her. Mr. Mayhew took out his flute and lovingly put it together. He was a powerful swarthy man, who said little and was generally alarm-

ROBERT ELSMERE

ing to the ladies of the neighbourhood. To propitiate him, they asked him to bring his flute, and nervously praised the fierce music he made on it. Miss Barks enjoyed a monopoly of his accompaniments, and there were many who regarded her assiduity as a covert attack upon the widower's name and position. If so, it was Greek meeting Greek, for with all his taciturnity the vicar of Shanmoor was well able to defend himself.

‘Has it begun?’ said a hurried whisper at Elsmere’s elbow, and turning he saw Rose and Agnes on the step of the window, Rose’s cheeks flushed by the night breeze, a shawl thrown lightly round her head.

She was answered by the first notes of the flute, following some powerful chords in which Miss Barks had tested at once the strength of her wrists and the vicarage piano.

The girl made a little *moue* of disgust, and turned as though to fly down the steps again. But Agnes caught her and held her, and the mutinous creature had to submit to be drawn inside while Mrs. Thornburgh, in obedience to complaints of draughts from Mrs. Seaton, motioned to have the window shut. Rose established herself against the wall, her curly head thrown back, her eyes half-shut, her mouth expressing an angry endurance. Robert watched her with amusement.

It was certainly a remarkable duet. After an *adagio* opening in which flute and piano were at magnificent cross-purposes from the beginning, the two instruments plunged into an *allegro* very long and very fast, which became ultimately a desperate race between the competing performers for the final chord.

WESTMORELAND

Mr. Mayhew toiled away, taxing the resources of his whole vast frame to keep his small instrument in a line with the piano, and taxing them in vain. For the shriller and the wilder grew the flute, and the greater the exertion of the dark Hercules performing on it, the fiercer grew the pace of the piano. Rose stamped her little foot.

‘Two bars ahead last page,’ she murmured, ‘three bars this: will no one stop her!’

But the pages flew past, turned assiduously by Agnes, who took a sardonic delight in these performances, and every countenance in the room seemed to take a look of sharpened anxiety as to how the duet was to end, and who was to be victor.

Nobody knowing Miss Barks need to have been in any doubt as to that! Crash came the last chord, and the poor flute nearly half a page behind was left shrilly hanging in mid-air, forsaken and companionless, an object of derision to gods and men.

‘Ah! I took it a little fast!’ said the lady, triumphantly looking up at the discomfited clergyman.

‘Mr. Elsmere,’ said Rose, hiding herself in the window curtain beside him, that she might have her laugh in safety, ‘do they play like that in Oxford, or has Long Whindale a monopoly?’

But before he could answer, Mrs. Thornburgh called to the girl —

‘Rose! Rose! Don’t go out again! It is your turn next!’

Rose advanced reluctantly, her head in air. Robert, remembering something that Mrs. Thornburgh had said to him as to her musical power, supposed that she

ROBERT ELSMERE

felt it an indignity to be asked to play in such company.

Mrs. Thornburgh motioned to him to come and sit by Mrs. Leyburn, a summons which he obeyed with the more alacrity, as it brought him once more within reach of Mrs. Leyburn's eldest daughter.

'Are you fond of music, Mr. Elsmere?' asked Mrs. Leyburn in her little mincing voice, making room for his chair beside them. 'If you are, I am sure my youngest daughter's playing will please you.'

Catherine moved abruptly. Robert, while he made some pleasant answer, divined that the reserved and stately daughter must be often troubled by the mother's expansiveness.

Meanwhile the room was again settling itself to listen. Mrs. Seaton was severely turning over a photograph-book. In her opinion the violin was an unbecoming instrument for young women. Miss Barks sat upright with the studiously neutral expression which befits the artist asked to listen to a rival. Mr. Thornburgh sat pensive, one foot drooped over the other. He was very fond of the Leyburn girls, but music seemed to him, good man, one of the least comprehensible of human pleasures. As for Rose, she had at last arranged herself and her accompanist Agnes, after routing out from her music a couple of *Fantasie-Stücke*, which she had wickedly chosen as presenting the most severely classical contrast to the 'rubbish' played by the preceding performers. She stood with her lithe figure in its old-fashioned dress thrown out against the black coats of a group of gentlemen beyond, one slim arched foot advanced, the ends of the blue

WESTMORELAND

sash dangling, the hand and the arm, beautifully formed, but still wanting the roundness of womanhood, raised high for action, the lightly poised head thrown back with an air. Robert thought her a bewitching, half-grown thing, overflowing with potentialities of future brilliance and empire.

Her music astonished him. Where had a little provincial maiden learned to play with this intelligence, this force, this delicate command of her instrument? He was not a musician, and therefore could not gauge her exactly, but he was more or less familiar with music and its standards, as all people become nowadays who live in a highly cultivated society, and he knew enough at any rate to see that what he was listening to was remarkable, was out of the common range. Still more evident was this, when from the humorous piece with which the sisters led off — a dance of clowns, but clowns of Arcady — they slid into a delicate rippling *chant d'amour*, the long-drawn notes of the violin rising and falling on the piano accompaniment with an exquisite plaintiveness. Where did a *fillette*, unformed, inexperienced, win the secret of so much eloquence — only from the natural dreams of a girl's heart as to 'the lovers waiting in the hidden years'?

But when the music ceased, Elsmere, after a hearty clap that set the room applauding likewise, turned not to the musician but the figure beside Mrs. Leyburn, the sister who had sat listening with an impassiveness, a sort of gentle remoteness of look, which had piqued his curiosity. The mother meanwhile was drinking in the compliments of Dr. Baker.

ROBERT ELSMERE

‘Excellent!’ cried Elsmere. ‘How in the name of fortune, Miss Leyburn, if I may ask, has your sister managed to get on so far in this remote place?’

‘She goes to Manchester every year to some relations we have there,’ said Catherine quietly; ‘I believe she has been very well taught.’

‘But surely,’ he said warmly, ‘it is more than teaching — more even than talent — there is something like genius in it!’

She did not answer very readily.

‘I don’t know,’ she said at last. ‘Every one says it is very good.’

He would have been repelled by her irresponsiveness but that her last words had in them a note of lingering, of wistfulness, as though the subject were connected with an inner debate not yet solved which troubled her. He was puzzled, but certainly not repelled.

Twenty minutes later everybody was going. The Seatons went first, and the other guests lingered a while afterwards to enjoy the sense of freedom left by their departure. But at last the Mayhews, father and son, set off on foot to walk home over the moonlit mountains; the doctor tucked himself and his daughter into his high gig, and drove off with a sweeping ironical bow to Rose, who had stood on the steps teasing him to the last; and Robert Elsmere offered to escort the Miss Leyburns and their mother home.

Mrs. Thornburgh was left protesting to the vicar’s incredulous ears that never — never as long as she lived — would she have Mrs. Seaton inside her doors again.

WESTMORELAND

‘Her manners’ — cried the vicar’s wife, fuming — ‘her manners would disgrace a Whinborough shop-girl. She has none — positively none!’

Then suddenly her round comfortable face brightened and broadened out into a beaming smile —

‘But, after all, William, say what you will — and you always do say the most unpleasant things you can think of — it was a great success. I know the Leyburns enjoyed it. And as for Robert, I saw him *looking* — *looking* at that little minx Rose while she was playing as if he could n’t take his eyes off her. What a picture she made, to be sure!’

The vicar, who had been standing with his back to the fireplace and his hands in his pockets, received his wife’s remarks first of all with lifted eyebrows, and then with a low chuckle, half-scornful, half-compassionate, which made her start in her chair.

‘Rose!’ he said impatiently. ‘Rose! my dear, where were your eyes?’

It was very rarely indeed that on her own ground, so to speak, the vicar ventured to take the whip-hand of her like this. Mrs. Thornburgh looked at him in amazement.

‘Do you mean to say,’ he asked, in raised tones, ‘that you did n’t notice that from the moment you first introduced Robert to Catherine Leyburn, he had practically no attention for anybody else?’

Mrs. Thornburgh gazed at him — her memory flew back over the evening — and her impulsive contradiction died on her lips. It was now her turn to ejaculate —

‘Catherine!’ she said feebly. ‘Catherine! how absurd!’

ROBERT ELSMERE

But she turned and, with quickened breath, looked out of window after the retreating figures. Mrs. Thornburgh went up to bed that night an inch taller. She had never felt herself more exquisitely indispensable, more of a personage.

CHAPTER IV

BEFORE, however, we go on to chronicle the ultimate success or failure of Mrs. Thornburgh as a match-maker, it may be well to inquire a little more closely into the antecedents of the man who had suddenly roused so much activity in her contriving mind. And, indeed, these antecedents are important to us. For the interest of an uncomplicated story will entirely depend upon the clearness with which the reader may have grasped the general outlines of a quick soul's development. And this development had already made considerable progress before Mrs. Thornburgh set eyes upon her husband's cousin, Robert Elsmere.

Robert Elsmere, then, was well born and fairly well provided with this world's goods; up to a certain moderate point, indeed, a favourite of fortune in all respects. His father belonged to the younger line of an old Sussex family, and owed his pleasant country living to the family instincts of his uncle, Sir William Elsmere, in whom Whig doctrines and Conservative traditions were pretty evenly mixed, with a result of the usual respectable and inconspicuous kind. His virtues had descended mostly to his daughters, while all his various weaknesses and fatuities had blossomed into vices in the person of his eldest son and heir, the Sir Mowbray Elsmere of Mrs. Seaton's early recollections.

ROBERT ELSMERE

Edward Elsmere, rector of Murewell in Surrey, and father of Robert, had died before his uncle and patron; and his widow and son had been left to face the world together. Sir William Elsmere and his nephew's wife had not much in common, and rarely concerned themselves with each other. Mrs. Elsmere was an Irish-woman by birth, with irregular Irish ways, and a passion for strange garments, which made her the dread of the conventional English squire; and, after she left the vicarage with her son, she and her husband's uncle met no more. But when he died it was found that the old man's sense of kinship, acting blindly and irrationally, but with a slow inevitableness and certainty, had stirred in him at the last in behalf of his great-nephew. He left him a money legacy, the interest of which was to be administered by his mother till his majority, and in a letter addressed to his heir he directed that, should the boy on attaining manhood show any disposition to enter the Church, all possible steps were to be taken to endow him with the family living of Murewell, which had been his father's, and which at the time of the old Baronet's death was occupied by another connexion of the family, already well stricken in years.

Mowbray Elsmere had been hardly on speaking terms with his cousin Edward, and was neither amiable nor generous, but his father knew that the tenacious Elsmere instinct was to be depended on for the fulfilment of his wishes. And so it proved. No sooner was his father dead than Sir Mowbray curtly communicated his instructions to Mrs. Elsmere, then living at the town of Harden for the sake of the great

WESTMORELAND

public school recently transported there. She was to inform him, when the right moment arrived, if it was the boy's wish to enter the Church, and meanwhile he referred her to his lawyers for particulars of such immediate benefits as were secured to her under the late Baronet's will.

At the moment when Sir Mowbray's letter reached her, Mrs. Elsmere was playing a leading part in the small society to which circumstances had consigned her. She was the personal friend of half the masters and their wives, and of at least a quarter of the school, while in the little town which stretched up the hill covered by the new school buildings, she was the helper, gossip, and confidante of half the parish. Her vast hats, strange in fashion and inordinate in brim, her shawls of many colours, hitched now to this side, now to that, her swaying gait and looped-up skirts, her spectacles, and the dangling parcels in which her soul delighted, were the outward signs of a personality familiar to all. For under those checked shawls which few women passed without an inward marvel, there beat one of the warmest hearts that ever animated mortal clay, and the prematurely wrinkled face, with its small quick eyes and shrewd indulgent mouth, bespoke a nature as responsive as it was vigorous.

Their owner was constantly in the public eye. Her house, during the hours at any rate in which her boy was at school, was little else than a halting-place between two journeys. Visits to the poor, long watches by the sick; committees, in which her racy breadth of character gave her always an important place; discussions with the vicar, arguments with the curates, a

ROBERT ELSMERE

chat with this person and a walk with that — these were the incidents and occupations which filled her day. Life was delightful to her; action, energy, influence, were delightful to her; she could only breathe freely in the very thick of the stirring, many-coloured tumult of existence. Whether it was a pauper in the workhouse, or boys from the school, or a girl caught in the tangle of a love-affair, it was all the same to Mrs. Elsmere. Everything moved her, everything appealed to her. Her life was a perpetual giving-forth, and such was the inherent nobility and soundness of the nature, that in spite of her curious Irish fondness for the vehement romantic sides of experience, she did little harm, and much good. Her tongue might be over-ready, and her championships indiscreet, but her hands were helpful, and her heart was true. There was something contagious in her enjoyment of life, and with all her strong religious faith, the thought of death, of any final pause and silence in the whirr of the great social machine, was to her a thought of greater chill and horror than to many a less brave and spiritual soul.

Till her boy was twelve years old, however, she had lived for him first and foremost. She had taught him, played with him, learnt with him, communicating to him through all his lessons her own fire and eagerness to a degree which every now and then taxed the physical powers of the child. Whenever the signs of strain appeared, however, the mother would be overtaken by a fit of repentant watchfulness, and for days together Robert would find her the most fascinating playmate, story-teller, and romp, and forget all his precocious interest in history or vulgar fractions. In after years,

WESTMORELAND

when Robert looked back upon his childhood, he was often reminded of the stories of Goethe's bringing-up. He could recall exactly the same scenes as Goethe describes, — mother and child sitting together in the gloaming, the mother's dark eyes dancing with fun or kindling with dramatic fire, as she carried an imaginary hero or heroine through a series of the raciest adventures; the child all eagerness and sympathy, now clapping his little hands at the fall of the giant, or the defeat of the sorcerer, and now arguing and suggesting in ways which gave perpetually fresh stimulus to the mother's inventiveness. He could see her dressing-up with him on wet days, reciting King Henry to his Prince Hal, or Prospero to his Ariel, or simply giving free vent to her own exuberant Irish fun till both he and she would sink exhausted into each other's arms, and end the evening with a long croon, sitting curled up together in a big armchair in front of the fire. He could see himself as a child of many crazes, eager for poetry one week, for natural history the next, now spending all his spare time in strumming, now in drawing, and now forgetting everything but the delights of tree-climbing and bird-nesting.

And through it all he had the quick memory of his mother's companionship, he could recall her rueful looks whenever the eager inaccurate ways, in which he reflected certain ineradicable tendencies of her own, had lost him a school advantage; he could remember her exhortations, with the dash in them of humorous self-reproach which made them so stirring to the child's affection; and he could realise their old far-off life at Murewell, the joys and the worries of it, and see

ROBERT ELSMERE

her now gossiping with the village folk, now wearing herself impetuously to death in their service, and now roaming with him over the Surrey heaths in search of all the dirty delectable things in which a boy-naturalist delights. And through it all he was conscious of the same vivid energetic creature, disposing with some difficulty and *fracas* of its own excess of nervous life.

To return, however, to this same critical moment of Sir Mowbray's offer. Robert at the time was a boy of sixteen, doing very well at school, a favourite both with boys and masters. But as to whether his development would lead him in the direction of taking orders, his mother had not the slightest idea. She was not herself very much tempted by the prospect. There were recollections connected with Murewell, and with the long death in life which her husband had passed through there, which were deeply painful to her; and, moreover, her sympathy with the clergy as a class was by no means strong. Her experience had not been large, but the feeling based on it promised to have all the tenacity of a favourite prejudice. Fortune had handed over the parish of Harden to a ritualist vicar. Mrs. Elsmere's inherited Evangelicalism — she came from an Ulster county — rebelled against his doctrine, but the man himself was too loveable to be disliked. Mrs. Elsmere knew a hero when she saw him. And in his own narrow way, the small-headed emaciated vicar was a hero, and he and Mrs. Elsmere had soon tasted each other's quality, and formed a curious alliance, founded on true similarity in difference.

But the criticism thus warded off the vicar expended itself with all the more force on his subor-

WESTMORELAND

dinates. The Harden curates were the chief crook in Mrs. Elsmere's otherwise tolerable lot. Her parish activities brought her across them perpetually, and she could not away with them. Their cassocks, their pretensions, their stupidities, roused the Irishwoman's sense of humour at every turn. The individuals came and went, but the type it seemed to her was always the same; and she made their peculiarities the basis of a pessimist theory as to the future of the English Church, which was a source of constant amusement to the very broad-minded young men who filled up the school staff. She, so ready in general to see all the world's good points, was almost blind when it was a curate's virtues which were in question. So that, in spite of all her persistent church-going, and her love of church performances as an essential part of the busy human spectacle, Mrs. Elsmere had no yearning for a clerical son. The little accidents of a personal experience had led to wide generalisations, as is the way with us mortals, and the position of the young parson in these days of increased parsonic pretensions was, to Mrs. Elsmere, a position in which there was an inherent risk of absurdity. She wished her son to impose upon her when it came to his taking any serious step in life. She asked for nothing better, indeed, than to be able, when the time came, to bow the motherly knee to him in homage, and she felt a little dread lest, in her flat moments, a clerical son might sometimes rouse in her that sharp sense of the ludicrous which is the enemy of all happy illusions.

Still, of course, the Elsmere proposal was one to be seriously considered in its due time and place. Mrs.

ROBERT ELSMERE

Elsmere only reflected that it would certainly be better to say nothing of it to Robert until he should be at college. His impressionable temperament, and the power he had occasionally shown of absorbing himself in a subject till it produced in him a fit of intense continuous brooding, unfavourable to health and nervous energy, all warned her not to supply him, at a period of rapid mental and bodily growth, with any fresh stimulus to the sense of responsibility. As a boy, he had always shown himself religiously susceptible to a certain extent, and his mother's religious likes and dislikes had invariably found in him a blind and chivalrous support. He was content to be with her, to worship with her, and to feel that no reluctance or resistance divided his heart from hers. But there had been nothing specially noteworthy or precocious about his religious development, and at sixteen or seventeen, in spite of his affectionate compliance, and his natural reverence for all persons and beliefs in authority, his mother was perfectly aware that many other things in his life were more real to him than religion. And on this point, at any rate, she was certainly not the person to force him.

He was such a schoolboy as a discerning master delights in — keen about everything, bright, docile, popular, excellent at games. He was in the sixth, moreover, as soon as his age allowed : that is to say, as soon as he was sixteen ; and his pride in everything connected with the great body in which he had already a marked and important place was unbounded. Very early in his school career the literary instincts, which had always been present in him, and which his mother

WESTMORELAND

had largely helped to develop by her own restless imaginative ways of approaching life and the world, made themselves felt with considerable force. Some time before his cousin's letter arrived, he had been taken with a craze for English poetry, and, but for the corrective influence of a favourite tutor, would probably have thrown himself into it with the same exclusive passion as he had shown for subject after subject in his eager ebullient childhood. His mother found him at thirteen inditing a letter on the subject of 'The Faerie Queene' to a school-friend, in which, with a sincerity which made her forgive the pomposity, he remarked —

'I can truly say, with Pope, that this great work has afforded me extraordinary pleasure.'

And about the same time, a master who was much interested in the boy's prospects of getting the school prize for Latin verse, a subject for which he had always shown a special aptitude, asked him anxiously, after an Easter holiday, what he had been reading; the boy ran his hands through his hair, and still keeping his finger between the leaves, shut a book before him from which he had been learning by heart, and which was, alas! neither Ovid nor Virgil.

'I have just finished Belial!' he said, with a sigh of satisfaction, 'and am beginning Beelzebub.'

A craze of this kind was naturally followed by a feverish period of juvenile authorship, when the house was littered over with stanzas from the opening canto of a great poem on Columbus, or with moral essays in the manner of Pope, castigating the vices of the time with an energy which sorely tried the gravity of the

ROBERT ELSMERE

mother whenever she was called upon, as she invariably was, to play audience to the young poet. At the same time the classics absorbed in reality their full share of this fast developing power. Virgil and Æschylus appealed to the same fibres, the same susceptibilities, as Milton and Shakespeare, and the boy's quick imaginative sense appropriated Greek and Latin life with the same ease which it showed in possessing itself of that bygone English life whence sprung the 'Canterbury Tales,' or 'As You Like It.' So that his tutor, who was much attached to him, and who made it one of his main objects in life to keep the boy's aspiring nose to the grindstone of grammatical *minutiæ*, began about the time of Sir Mowbray's letter to prophesy very smooth things indeed to his mother as to his future success at college, the possibility of his getting the famous St. Anselm's scholarship, and so on.

Evidently such a youth was not likely to depend for the attainment of a foothold in life on a piece of family privilege. The world was all before him where to choose, Mrs. Elsmere thought proudly to herself, as her mother's fancy wandered rashly through the coming years. And for many reasons she secretly allowed herself to hope that he would find for himself some other post of ministry in a very various world than the vicarage of Murewell.

So she wrote a civil letter of acknowledgement to Sir Mowbray, informing him that the intentions of his great-uncle should be communicated to the boy when he should be of fit age to consider them, and that meanwhile she was obliged to him for pointing out the

WESTMORELAND

procedure by which she might lay hands on the legacy bequeathed to her in trust for her son, the income of which would now be doubly welcome in view of his college expenses. There the matter rested, and Mrs. Elsmere, during the two years which followed, thought little more about it. She became more and more absorbed in her boy's immediate prospects, in the care of his health, which was uneven and tried somewhat by the strain of preparation for an attempt on the St. Anselm's scholarship, and in the demands which his ardent nature, oppressed with the weight of its own aspirations, was constantly making upon her support and sympathy.

At last the moment so long expected arrived. Mrs. Elsmere and her son left Harden amid a chorus of good wishes, and settled themselves early in November in Oxford lodgings. Robert was to have a few days' complete holiday before the examination, and he and his mother spent it in exploring the beautiful old town, now shrouded in the 'pensive glooms' of still, grey autumn weather. There was no sun to light up the misty reaches of the river; the trees in the Broad Walk were almost bare; the Virginian creeper no longer shone in patches of delicate crimson on the college walls; the gardens were damp and forsaken. But to Mrs. Elsmere and Robert the place needed neither sun nor summer 'for beauty's heightening.' On both of them it laid its old irresistible spell; the sentiment haunting its quadrangles, its libraries, and its dim melodious chapels, stole into the lad's heart and alternately soothed and stimulated that keen individual consciousness which naturally accompanies the

ROBERT ELSMERE

first entrance into manhood. Here, on this soil, steeped in memories, *his* problems, *his* struggles were to be fought out in their turn. 'Take up thy manhood,' said the inward voice, 'and show what is in thee. The hour and the opportunity have come!'

And to this thrill of vague expectation, this young sense of an expanding world, something of pathos and of sacredness was added by the dumb influences of the old streets and weather-beaten stones. How tenacious they were of the past! The dreaming city seemed to be still brooding in the autumn calm over the long succession of her sons. The continuity, the complexity of human experience; the unremitting effort of the race; the stream of purpose running through it all; these were the kind of thoughts which, in more or less inchoate and fragmentary shape, pervaded the boy's sensitive mind as he rambled with his mother from college to college.

Mrs. Elsmere, too, was fascinated by Oxford. But for all her eager interest, the historic beauty of the place aroused in her an under-mood of melancholy, just as it did in Robert. Both had the impressionable Celtic temperament, and both felt that a critical moment was upon them, and that the Oxford air was charged with fate for each of them. For the first time in their lives they were to be parted. The mother's long guardianship was coming to an end. Had she loved him enough? Had she so far fulfilled the trust her dead husband had imposed upon her? Would her boy love her in the new life as he had loved her in the old? And could her poor craving heart bear to see him absorbed by fresh interests and passions, in which

The Lime Walk, Oxford



WESTMORELAND

her share could be only, at the best, secondary and indirect?

One day — it was on the afternoon preceding the examination — she gave hurried, half-laughing utterance to some of these misgivings of hers. They were walking down the Lime-walk of Trinity Gardens; beneath their feet a yellow fresh-strewn carpet of leaves, brown interlacing branches overhead, and a red misty sun shining through the trunks. Robert understood his mother perfectly, and the way she had of hiding a storm of feeling under these tremulous comedy airs. So that, instead of laughing too, he took her hand and, there being no spectators anywhere to be seen in the damp November garden, he raised it to his lips with a few broken words of affection and gratitude which very nearly overcame the self-command of both of them. She dashed wildly into another subject, and then suddenly it occurred to her impulsive mind that the moment had come to make him acquainted with those dying intentions of his great-uncle which we have already described. The diversion was a welcome one, and the duty seemed clear. So, accordingly, she made him give her all his attention while she told him the story and the terms of Sir Mowbray's letter, forcing herself the while to keep her own opinions and predilections as much as possible out of sight.

Robert listened with interest and astonishment, the sense of a new-found manhood waxing once more strong within him, as his mind admitted the strange picture of himself occupying the place which had been his father's; master of the house and the parish he had wandered over with childish steps, clinging to the

ROBERT ELSMERE

finger or the coat of the tall, stooping figure which occupied the dim background of his recollections. 'Poor mother,' he said thoughtfully, when she paused, 'it would be hard upon *you* to go back to Murewell!'

'Oh, you must n't think of me when the time comes,' said Mrs. Elsmere, sighing. 'I shall be a tiresome old woman, and you will be a young man wanting a wife. There, put it out of your head, Robert. I thought I had better tell you, for, after all, the fact may concern your Oxford life. But you've got a long time yet before you need begin to worry about it.'

The boy drew himself up to his full height, and tossed his tumbling reddish hair back from his eyes. He was nearly six feet already, with a long thin body and head, which amply justified his school nickname of 'the darning-needle.'

'Don't you trouble either, mother,' he said, with a tone of decision; 'I don't feel as if I should ever take orders.'

Mrs. Elsmere was old enough to know what importance to attach to the trenchancy of eighteen, but still the words were pleasant to her.

The next day Robert went up for examination, and after three days of hard work, and phases of alternate hope and depression, in which mother and son excited one another to no useful purpose, there came the anxious crowding round the College gate in the November twilight, and the sudden flight of dispersing messengers bearing the news over Oxford. The scholarship had been won by a precocious Etonian with an extraordinary talent for 'stems,' and all that apper-

WESTMORELAND

taineth thereto. But the exhibition fell to Robert, and mother and son were well content.

The boy was eager to come into residence at once, though he would matriculate too late to keep the term. The College authorities were willing, and on the Saturday following the announcement of his success he was matriculated, saw the Provost, and was informed that rooms would be found for him without delay. His mother and he gaily climbed innumerable stairs to inspect the garrets of which he was soon to take proud possession, sallying forth from them only to enjoy an agitated delightful afternoon among the shops. Expenditure, always charming, becomes under these circumstances a sacred and pontifical act. Never had Mrs. Elsmere bought a teapot for herself with half the fervour which she now threw into the purchase of Robert's; and the young man, accustomed to a rather bare home, and an Irish lack of the little elegancies of life, was overwhelmed when his mother actually dragged him into a printseller's, and added an engraving or two to the enticing miscellaneous mass of which he was already master.

They only just left themselves time to rush back to their lodgings and dress for the solemn function of a dinner with the Provost. The dinner, however, was a great success. The short, shy manner of their white-haired host thawed under the influence of Mrs. Elsmere's racy, unaffected ways, and it was not long before everybody in the room had more or less made friends with her, and forgiven her her marvellous drab poplin, adorned with fresh pink ruchings for the occasion. As for the Provost, Mrs. Elsmere had been told

ROBERT ELSMERE

that he was a person of whom she must inevitably stand in awe. But all her life long she had been like the youth in the fairy-tale who desired to learn how to shiver and could not attain unto it. Fate had denied her the capacity of standing in awe of anybody, and she rushed at her host as a new type, delighting in the thrill which she felt creeping over her when she found herself on the arm of one who had been the rallying-point of a hundred struggles, and a centre of influence over thousands of English lives.

• And then followed the proud moment when Robert, in his exhibitioner's gown, took her to service in the chapel on Sunday. The scores of young faces, the full unison of the hymns, and finally the Provost's sermon, with its strange brusqueries and simplicities of manner and phrase — simplicities so suggestive, so full of a rich and yet disciplined experience, that they haunted her mind for weeks afterwards — completed the general impression made upon her by the Oxford life. She came out, tremulous and shaken, leaning on her son's arm. She, too, like the generations before her, had launched her venture into the deep. Her boy was putting out from her into the ocean; henceforth she could but watch him from the shore. Brought into contact with this imposing University organisation, with all its suggestions of virile energies and functions, the mother suddenly felt herself insignificant and forsaken. He had been her all, her own, and now on this training-ground of English youth, it seemed to her that the great human society had claimed him from her.

CHAPTER V

IN his Oxford life Robert surrendered himself to the best and most stimulating influences of the place, just as he had done at school. He was a youth of many friends, by virtue of a natural gift of sympathy, which was no doubt often abused, and by no means invariably profitable to its owner, but wherein, at any rate, his power over his fellows, like the power of half the potent men in the world's history, always lay rooted. He had his mother's delight in living. He loved the cricket-field, he loved the river; his athletic instincts and his athletic friends were always fighting in him with his literary instincts and the friends who appealed primarily to the intellectual and moral side of him. He made many mistakes alike in friends and in pursuits; in the freshness of a young and roving curiosity he had great difficulty in submitting himself to the intellectual routine of the University, a difficulty which ultimately cost him much; but at the bottom of the lad, all the time, there was a strength of will, a force and even tyranny of conscience, which kept his charm and pliancy from degenerating into weakness, and made it not only delightful, but profitable to love him. He knew that his mother was bound up in him, and his being was set to satisfy, so far as he could, all her honourable ambitions.

His many undergraduate friends, strong as their influence must have been in the aggregate on a nature

ROBERT ELSMERE

so receptive, hardly concern us here. His future life, so far as we can see, was most noticeably affected by two men older than himself, and belonging to the dons — both of them fellows and tutors of St. Anselm's, though on different planes of age.

The first one, Edward Langham, was Robert's tutor, and about seven years older than himself. He was a man about whom, on entering the College, Robert heard more than the usual crop of stories. The healthy young English barbarian has an aversion to the intrusion of more manner into life than is absolutely necessary. Now, Langham was overburdened with manner, though it was manner of the deprecating and not of the arrogant order. Decisions, it seemed, of all sorts were abominable to him. To help a friend he had once consented to be Pro-proctor. He resigned in a month, and none of his acquaintances ever afterwards dared to allude to the experience. If you could have got at his inmost mind, it was affirmed, the persons most obnoxious there would have been found to be the scout, who intrusively asked him every morning what he would have for breakfast, and the College cook, who, till such a course was strictly forbidden him, mounted to his room at half-past nine to inquire whether he would 'dine in.' Being a scholar of considerable eminence, it pleased him to assume on all questions an exasperating degree of ignorance; and the wags of the College averred that when asked if it rained, or if collections took place on such and such a day, it was pain and grief to him to have to affirm positively, without qualifications, that so it was.

Such a man was not very likely, one would have

WESTMORELAND

thought, to captivate an ardent, impulsive boy like Elsmere. Edward Langham, however, notwithstanding undergraduate tales, was a very remarkable person. In the first place, he was possessed of exceptional personal beauty. His colouring was vividly black-and-white, closely curling jet-black hair, and fine black eyes contrasting with a pale, clear complexion and even, white teeth. So far he had the characteristics which certain Irishmen share with most Spaniards. But the Celtic or Iberian brilliance was balanced by a classical delicacy and precision of feature. He had the brow, the nose, the upper lip, the finely-moulded chin, which belong to the more severe and spiritual Greek type. Certainly of Greek blitheness and directness there was no trace. The eye was wavering and profoundly melancholy; all the movements of the tall, finely-built frame were hesitating and doubtful. It was as though the man were suffering from paralysis of some moral muscle or other; as if some of the normal springs of action in him had been profoundly and permanently weakened.

He had a curious history. He was the only child of a doctor in a Lincolnshire country town. His old parents had brought him up in strict provincial ways, ignoring the boy's idiosyncrasies as much as possible. They did not want an exceptional and abnormal son, and they tried to put down his dreamy, self-conscious habits by forcing him into the common, middle-class, Evangelical groove. As soon as he got to college, however, the brooding, gifted nature had a moment of sudden and, as it seemed to the old people in Gainsborough, most reprehensible expansion. Poems were

ROBERT ELSMERE

sent to them, cut out of one or the other of the leading periodicals, with their son's initials appended, and articles of philosophical art-criticism, published while the boy was still an undergraduate — which seemed to the stern father everything that was sophistical and subversive. For they treated Christianity itself as an open question, and showed especially scant respect for the 'Protestantism of the Protestant religion.' The father warned him grimly that he was not going to spend his hard-earned savings on the support of a free-thinking scribbler, and the young man wrote no more till just after he had taken a double first in Greats. Then the publication of an article in one of the leading Reviews on 'The Ideals of Modern Culture' not only brought him a furious letter from home stopping all supplies, but also lost him a probable fellowship. His College was one of the narrowest and most backward in Oxford, and it was made perfectly plain to him before the fellowship examination that he would not be elected.

He left the College, took pupils for a while, then stood for a vacant fellowship at St. Anselm's, the Liberal headquarters, and got it with flying colours.

Thenceforward one would have thought that a brilliant and favourable mental development was secured to him. Not at all. The moment of his quarrel with his father and his College had, in fact, represented a moment of energy, of comparative success, which never recurred. It was as though this outburst of action and liberty had disappointed him, as if some deep-rooted instinct — cold, critical, reflective — had reasserted itself, condemning him and his censors equally. The

WESTMORELAND

uselessness of utterance, the futility of enthusiasm, the inaccessibility of the ideal, the practical absurdity of trying to realise any of the mind's inward dreams: these were the kind of considerations which descended upon him, slowly and fatally, crushing down the newly springing growths of action or of passion. It was as though life had demonstrated to him the essential truth of a childish saying of his own which had startled and displeased his Calvinist mother years before. 'Mother,' the delicate, large-eyed child had said to her one day in a fit of physical weariness, 'how is it I dislike the things I dislike so much more than I like the things I like?'

So he wrote no more, he quarrelled no more, he meddled with the great passionate things of life and expression no more. On his taking up residence in St. Anselm's, indeed, and on his being appointed first lecturer and then tutor, he had a momentary pleasure in the thought of teaching. His mind was a storehouse of thought and fact, and to the man brought up at a dull provincial day-school and never allowed to associate freely with his kind, the bright lads fresh from Eton and Harrow about him were singularly attractive. But a few terms were enough to scatter this illusion too. He could not be simple, he could not be spontaneous; he was tormented by self-consciousness, and it was impossible to him to talk and behave as those talk and behave who have been brought up more or less in the big world from the beginning. So this dream, too, faded, for youth asks, before all things, simplicity and spontaneity in those who would take possession of it. His lectures, which were at first

ROBERT ELSMERE

brilliant enough to attract numbers of men from other colleges, became gradually mere dry, ingenious skeletons, without life or feeling. It was possible to learn a great deal from him; it was not possible to catch from him any contagion of that *amor intellectualis* which had flamed at one moment so high within him. He ceased to compose; but as the intellectual faculty must have some employment, he became a translator, a contributor to dictionaries, a microscopic student of texts, not in the interest of anything beyond, but simply as a kind of mental stone-breaking.

The only survival of that moment of glow and colour in his life was his love of music and the theatre. Almost every year he disappeared to France to haunt the Paris theatres for a fortnight; to Berlin or Bayreuth to drink his fill of music. He talked neither of music nor of acting; he made no one sharer of his enjoyment, if he did enjoy. It was simply his way of cheating his creative faculty, which, though it had grown impotent, was still there, still restless. Altogether a melancholy, pitiable man — at once thorough-going sceptic and thorough-going idealist, the victim of that critical sense which says No to every impulse, and is always restlessly, and yet hopelessly, seeking the future through the neglected and outraged present.

And yet the man's instincts, at this period of his life, at any rate, were habitually kindly and affectionate. He knew nothing of women, and was not liked by them, but it was not his fault if he made no impression on the youth about him. It seemed to him that he was always seeking in their eyes and faces for some light of

WESTMORELAND

sympathy which was always escaping him, and which he was powerless to compel. He met it for the first time in Robert Elsmere. The susceptible, poetical boy was struck at some favourable moment by that romantic side of the ineffective tutor — his silence, his melancholy, his personal beauty — which no one else, with perhaps one or two exceptions among the older men, cared to take into account; or touched perhaps by some note in him, surprised in passing, of weariness or shrinking, as compared with the contemptuous tone of the College towards him. He showed his liking impetuously, boyishly, as his way was, and thenceforward during his University career Langham became his slave. He had no ambition for himself; his motto might have been that dismal one — ‘The small things of life are odious to me, and the habit of them enslaves me; the great things of life are eternally attractive to me, and indolence and fear put them by’; but for the University chances of this lanky, red-haired youth — with his eagerness, his boundless curiosity, his genius for all sorts of loveable mistakes — he disquieted himself greatly. He tried to discipline the roving mind, to infuse into the boy’s literary temper the delicacy, the precision, the subtlety of his own. His fastidious, critical habits of work supplied exactly that antidote which Elsmere’s main faults of haste and carelessness required. He was always holding up before him the inexhaustible patience and labour involved in all true knowledge; and it was to the germs of critical judgment so implanted in him that Elsmere owed many of the later growths of his development — growths with which we have not yet to concern ourselves.

ROBERT ELSMERE

And in return, the tutor allowed himself rarely, very rarely, a moment of utterance from the depths of his real self. One evening in the summer term following the boy's matriculation, Elsmere brought him an essay after Hall, and they sat on talking afterwards. It was a rainy, cheerless evening; the first contest of the Boats week had been rowed in cold wind and sleet; a dreary blast whistled through the College. Suddenly Langham reached out his hand for an open letter. 'I have had an offer, Elsmere,' he said abruptly.

And he put it into his hand. It was the offer of an important Scotch professorship, coming from the man most influential in assigning it. The last occupant of the post had been a scholar of European eminence. Langham's contributions to a great foreign review, and certain Oxford recommendations, were the basis of the present overture, which, coming from one who was himself a classic of the classics, was couched in terms flattering to any young man's vanity.

Robert looked up with a joyful exclamation when he had finished the letter.

'I congratulate you, sir.'

'I have refused it,' said Langham abruptly.

His companion sat open-mouthed. Young as he was, he knew perfectly well that this particular appointment was one of the blue ribbons of British scholarship.

'Do you think' — said the other in a tone of singular vibration, which had in it a note of almost contemptuous irritation — 'do you think *I* am the man to get and keep a hold on a rampagious class of hundreds of Scotch lads? Do you think *I* am the man to

WESTMORELAND

carry on what Reid began — Reid, that old fighter, that preacher of all sorts of jubilant dogmas?’

He looked at Elsmere under his straight black brows imperiously. The youth felt the nervous tension in the elder man’s voice and manner, was startled by a confidence never before bestowed upon him, close as that unequal bond between them had been growing during the six months of his Oxford life, and plucking up courage hurled at him a number of frank, young expostulations, which really put into friendly shape all that was being said about Langham in his College and in the University. Why was he so self-distrustful, so absurdly diffident of responsibility, so bent on hiding his great gifts under a bushel?

The tutor smiled sadly, and, sitting down, buried his head in his hands and said nothing for a while. Then he looked up and stretched out a hand towards a book which lay on a table near. It was the ‘*Rêveries*’ of Sénancour. ‘My answer is written *here*,’ he said. ‘It will seem to you now, Elsmere, mere Midsummer madness. May it always seem so to you. Forgive me. The pressure of solitude sometimes is too great.’

Elsmere looked up with one of his flashing, affectionate smiles, and took the book from Langham’s hand. He found on the open page a marked passage:—

‘Oh swiftly passing seasons of life! There was a time when men seemed to be sincere; when thought was nourished on friendship, kindness, love; when dawn still kept its brilliance, and the night its peace. *I can*, the soul said to itself, and *I will*; I will do all that is right — all that is natural. But soon resistance, difficulty, unforeseen, coming we know not whence, arrest

ROBERT ELSMERE

us, undecieve us, and the human yoke grows heavy on our necks. Thenceforward we become merely sharers in the common woe. Hemmed in on all sides, we feel our faculties only to realise their impotence: we have time and strength to do what we *must*, never what we will. Men go on repeating the words *work, genius, success*. Fools! Will all these resounding projects, though they enable us to cheat ourselves, enable us to cheat the icy fate which rules us and our globe, wandering forsaken through the vast silence of the heavens?’

Robert looked up startled, the book dropping from his hand. The words sent a chill to the heart of one born to hope, to will, to crave.

Suddenly Langham dashed the volume from him, almost with violence.

‘Forget that drivell, Elsmere. It was a crime to show it to you. It is not sane; neither perhaps am I. But I am not going to Scotland. They would request me to resign in a week.’

Long after Elsmere, who had stayed talking a while on other things, had gone, Langham sat on brooding over the empty grate.

‘Corrupter of youth!’ he said to himself once bitterly. And perhaps it was to a certain remorse in the tutor’s mind that Elsmere owed an experience of great importance to his after life.

The name of a certain Mr. Grey had for some time before his entry at Oxford been more or less familiar to Robert’s ears as that of a person of great influence and consideration at St. Anselm’s. His tutor at Harden had spoken of him in the boy’s hearing as one of the most remarkable men of the generation, and had

WESTMORELAND

several times impressed upon his pupil that nothing could be so desirable for him as to secure the friendship of such a man. It was on the occasion of his first interview with the Provost, after the scholarship examination, that Robert was first brought face to face with Mr. Grey. He could remember a short dark man standing beside the Provost, who had been introduced to him by that name, but the nervousness of the moment had been so great that the boy had been quite incapable of giving him any special attention.

During his first term and a half of residence, Robert occasionally met Mr. Grey in the quadrangle or in the street, and the tutor, remembering the thin, bright-faced youth, would return his salutations kindly, and sometimes stop to speak to him, to ask him if he were comfortably settled in his rooms, or make a remark about the boats. But the acquaintance did not seem likely to progress, for Mr. Grey was a Greats tutor, and Robert naturally had nothing to do with him as far as work was concerned.

However, a day or two after the conversation we have described, Robert, going to Langham's rooms late in the afternoon to return a book which had been lent to him, perceived two figures standing talking on the hearth-rug, and by the western light beating in recognised the thick-set frame and broad brow of Mr. Grey.

'Come in, Elsmere,' said Langham, as he stood hesitating on the threshold. - 'You have met Mr. Grey before, I think?'

'We first met at an anxious moment,' said Mr. Grey, smiling and shaking hands with the boy. 'A first inter-

ROBERT ELSMERE

view with the Provost is always formidable. I remember it too well myself. You did very well, I remember, Mr. Elsmere. Well, Langham, I must be off. I shall be late for my meeting as it is. I think we have settled our business. Good-night.'

Langham stood a moment after the door closed, eyeing young Elsmere. There was a curious struggle going on in the tutor's mind.

'Elsmere,' he said at last abruptly, 'would you like to go to-night and hear Grey preach?'

'Preach!' exclaimed the lad. 'I thought he was a layman.'

'So he is. It will be a lay sermon. It was always the custom here with the clerical tutors to address their men once a term before Communion Sunday, and some years ago, when Grey first became tutor, he determined, though he was a layman, to carry on the practice. It was an extraordinary effort, for he is a man to whom words on such a subject are the coining of his heart's blood, and he has repeated it very rarely. It is two years now since his last address.'

'Of course I should like to go,' said Robert, with eagerness. 'Is it open?'

'Strictly it is for his Greats pupils, but I can take you in.. It is hardly meant for freshmen; but — well, you are far enough on to make it interesting to you.'

'The lad will take to Grey's influence like a fish to water,' thought the tutor to himself when he was alone, not without a strange reluctance. 'Well, no one can say I have not given him his opportunity to be "earnest."'

WESTMORELAND

The sarcasm of the last word was the kind of sarcasm which a man of his type in an earlier generation might have applied to the 'earnestness' of an Arnoldian Rugby.

At eight o'clock that evening Robert found himself crossing the quadrangle with Langham on the way to one of the larger lecture-rooms, which was to be the scene of the address. The room when they got in was already nearly full, all the working fellows of the College were present, and a body of some thirty men besides, most of them already far on in their University career. A minute or two afterwards Mr. Grey entered. The door opening on to the quadrangle, where the trees, undeterred by east wind, were just bursting into leaf, was shut; and the little assembly knelt, while Mr. Grey's voice with its broad intonation, in which a strong native homeliness lingered under the gentleness of accent, recited the collect 'Lord of all power and might,' a silent pause following the last words. Then the audience settled itself, and Mr. Grey, standing by a small deal table with the gaslight behind him, began his address.

All the main points of the experience which followed stamped themselves on Robert's mind with extraordinary intensity. Nor did he ever lose the memory of the outward scene. In after years, memory could always recall to him at will the face and figure of the speaker, the massive head, the deep eyes sunk under the brows, the Midland accent, the make of limb and feature which seemed to have some suggestion in them of the rude strength and simplicity of a peasant ancestry; and then the nobility, the fire, the spiritual beauty

flashing through it all! Here, indeed, was a man on whom his fellows might lean, a man in whom the generation of spiritual force was so strong and continuous that it overflowed of necessity into the poorer, barren lives around him, kindling and enriching. Robert felt himself seized and penetrated, filled with a fervour and an admiration which he was too young and immature to analyse, but which was to be none the less potent and lasting.

Much of the sermon itself, indeed, was beyond him. It was on the meaning of St. Paul's great conception, 'Death unto sin and a new birth unto righteousness.' What did the Apostle mean by a death to sin and self? What were the precise ideas attached to the words 'risen with Christ'? Are this death and this resurrection necessarily dependent upon certain alleged historical events? Or are they not primarily, and were they not, even in the mind of St. Paul, two aspects of a spiritual process perpetually re-enacted in the soul of man, and constituting the veritable revelation of God? Which is the stable and lasting witness of the Father: the spiritual history of the individual and the world, or the envelope of miracle to which hitherto mankind has attributed so much importance?

Mr. Grey's treatment of these questions was clothed, throughout a large portion of the lecture, in metaphysical language, which no boy fresh from school, however intellectually quick, could be expected to follow with any precision. It was not, therefore, the argument, or the logical structure of the sermon, which so profoundly affected young Elsmere. It was the speaker

WESTMORELAND

himself, and the occasional passages in which, addressing himself to the practical needs of his hearers, he put before them the claims and conditions of the higher life with a pregnant simplicity and rugged beauty of phrase. Conceit, selfishness, vice — how, as he spoke of them, they seemed to wither from his presence! How the 'pitiful, earthy self' with its passions and its cravings sank into nothingness beside the 'great ideas' and the 'great causes' for which, as Christians and as men, he claimed their devotion.

To the boy sitting among the crowd at the back of the room, his face supported in his hands and his gleaming eyes fixed on the speaker, it seemed as if all the poetry and history through which a restless curiosity and ideality had carried him so far, took a new meaning from this experience. It was by men like this that the moral progress of the world had been shaped and inspired; he felt brought near to the great primal forces breathing through the divine workshop; and in place of natural disposition and reverent compliance, there sprang up in him suddenly an actual burning certainty of belief. 'Axioms are not axioms,' said poor Keats, 'till they have been proved upon our pulses'; and the old familiar figure of the divine combat, of the struggle in which man and God are one, was proved once more upon a human pulse on that May night, in the hush of that quiet lecture-room.

As the little moving crowd of men dispersed over the main quadrangle to their respective staircases, Langham and Robert stood together a moment in the windy darkness, lit by the occasional glimmering of a cloudy moon.

ROBERT ELSMERE

‘Thank you, thank you, sir!’ said the lad, eager and yet afraid to speak, lest he should break the spell of memory. ‘I should be sorry indeed to have missed that!’

‘Yes, it was fine, extraordinarily fine, the best he has ever given, I think. Good-night.’

And Langham turned away, his head sunk on his breast, his hands behind him. Robert went to his room conscious of a momentary check of feeling. But it soon passed, and he sat up late, thinking of the sermon, or pouring out in a letter to his mother the new hero-worship of which his mind was full.

A few days later, as it happened, came an invitation to the junior exhibitor to spend an evening at Mr. Grey’s house. Elsmere went in a state of curious eagerness and trepidation, and came away with a number of fresh impressions which, when he had put them into order, did but quicken his new-born sense of devotion. The quiet unpretending house with its exquisite neatness and its abundance of books, the family life, with the heart-happiness underneath, and the gentle trust and courtesy on the surface, the little touches of austerity which betrayed themselves here and there in the household ways — all these surroundings stole into the lad’s imagination, touched in him responsive fibres of taste and feeling.

But there was some surprise, too, mingled with the charm. He came, still shaken, as it were, by the power of the sermon, expecting to see in the preacher of it the outward and visible signs of a leadership which, as he already knew, was a great force in Oxford life. His mood was that of the disciple only eager to be en-

WESTMORELAND

rolled. And what he found was a quiet, friendly host, surrounded by a group of men talking the ordinary pleasant Oxford chit-chat — the river, the schools, the Union, the football matches, and so on. Every now and then, as Elsmere stood at the edge of the circle listening, the rugged face in the centre of it would break into a smile, or some boyish speaker would elicit the low spontaneous laugh in which there was such a sound of human fellowship, such a genuine note of self-forgetfulness. Sometimes the conversation strayed into politics, and then Mr. Grey, an eager politician, would throw back his head, and talk with more sparkle and rapidity, flashing occasionally into grim humour which seemed to throw light on the innate strength and pugnacity of the peasant and Puritan breed from which he sprang. Nothing could be more unlike the inspired philosopher, the mystic surrounded by an adoring school, whom Robert had been picturing to himself in his walk up to the house, through the soft May twilight.

It was not long before the tutor had learned to take much kindly notice of the ardent and yet modest exhibitioner, in whose future it was impossible not to feel a sympathetic interest.

‘You will always find us on Sunday afternoons, before chapel,’ he said to him one day as they parted, after watching a football match in the damp mists of the Park, and the boy’s flush of pleasure showed how much he valued the permission.

For three years those Sunday half-hours were the great charm of Robert Elsmere’s life. When he came to look back upon them, he could remember nothing

ROBERT ELSMERE

very definite. A few interesting scraps of talk about books; a good deal of talk about politics, showing in the tutor a living interest in the needs and training of that broadening democracy on which the future of England rests; a few graphic sayings about individuals; above all, a constant readiness on the host's part to listen, to sit quiet, with the slight unconscious look of fatigue which was so eloquent of a strenuous intellectual life, taking kindly heed of anything that sincerity, even a stupid awkward sincerity, had got to say — these were the sort of impressions they had left behind them, re-enforced always, indeed, by the one continuous impression of a great soul speaking with difficulty and labour, but still clearly, still effectually, through an unblemished series of noble acts and efforts.

Term after term passed away. Mrs. Elsmere became more and more proud of her boy, and more and more assured that her years of intelligent devotion to him had won her his entire love and confidence, 'so long as they both should live.' She came up to see him once or twice, making Langham almost flee the University because she would be grateful to him in public, and attending the boat-races in festive attire to which she had devoted the most anxious attention for Robert's sake, and which made her, dear, good, impracticable soul, the observed of all observers. When she came she and Robert talked all day, so far as lectures allowed, and most of the night, after their own eager, improvident fashion; and she soon gathered, with that solemn, half-tragic sense of change which besets a mother's heart at such a moment, that there were

WESTMORELAND

many new forces at work in her boy's mind, deep under-currents of feeling, stirred in him by the Oxford influences, which must before long rise powerfully to the surface.

He was passing from a bright buoyant lad into a man, and a man of ardour and conviction. And the chief instrument in the transformation was Mr. Grey.

Elsmere got his first in Moderations easily. But the Final Schools were a different matter. In the first days of his return to Oxford, in the October of his third year, while he was still making up his lecture list, and taking a general oversight of the work demanded from him, before plunging definitely into it, he was oppressed with a sense that the two years lying before him constituted a problem which would be harder to solve than any which had yet been set him. It seemed to him in a moment which was one of some slackness and reaction, that he had been growing too fast. He had been making friends besides in far too many camps, and the thought, half attractive, half repellent, of all those midnight discussions over smouldering fires, which Oxford was preparing for him, those fascinating moments of intellectual fence with minds as eager and as crude as his own, and of all the delightful dipping into the very latest literature, which such moments encouraged and involved, seemed to convey a sort of warning to the boy's will that it was not equal to the situation. He was neither dull enough nor great enough for a striking Oxford success. How was he to prevent himself from attempting impossibilities and achieving a final mediocrity? He felt a dismal certainty that he should never be able to control the

ROBERT ELSMERE

strayings of will and curiosity, now into this path, now into that; and a still stronger and genuine certainty that it is not by such digression that a man gets up the Ethics or the Annals.

Langham watched him with a half-irritable attention. In spite of the paralysis of all natural ambitions in himself, he was illogically keen that Elsmere should win the distinctions of the place. He, the most laborious, the most disinterested of scholars, turned himself almost into a crammer for Elsmere's benefit. He abused the lad's multifarious reading, declared it was no better than dram-drinking, and even preached to him an ingenious variety of mechanical aids to memory and short cuts to knowledge, till Robert would turn round upon him with some triumphant retort drawn from his own utterances at some sincerer and less discreet moment. In vain. Langham felt a dismal certainty before many weeks were over that Elsmere would miss his first in Greats. He was too curious, too restless, too passionate about many things. Above all he was beginning, in the tutor's opinion, to concern himself disastrously early with that most overwhelming and most brain-confusing of all human interests — the interest of religion. Grey had made him 'earnest' with a vengeance.

Elsmere was now attending Grey's philosophical lectures, following them with enthusiasm, and making use of them, as so often happens, for the defence and fortification of views quite other than his teacher's. The whole basis of Grey's thought was ardently idealist and Hegelian. He had broken with the popular Christianity, but for him, God, consciousness, duty,

WESTMORELAND

were the only realities. None of the various forms of materialist thought escaped his challenge ; no genuine utterance of the spiritual life of man but was sure of his sympathy. It was known that after having prepared himself for the Christian ministry he had remained a layman because it had become impossible to him to accept miracle ; and it was evident that the commoner type of Churchmen regarded him as an antagonist all the more dangerous because he was so sympathetic. But the negative and critical side of him was what in reality told least upon his pupils. He was reserved, he talked with difficulty, and his respect for the immaturity of the young lives near him was complete. So that what he sowed others often reaped, or to quote the expression of a well-known rationalist about him : 'The Tories were always carrying off his honey to their hive.' Elsmere, for instance, took in all that Grey had to give, drank in all the ideal fervour, the spiritual enthusiasm of the great tutor, and then as Grey himself would have done some twenty years earlier, carried his religious passion so stimulated into the service of the great positive tradition around him.

And at that particular moment in Oxford history, the passage from philosophic idealism to glad acquiescence in the received Christian system, was a peculiarly easy one. It was the most natural thing in the world that a young man of Elsmere's temperament should rally to the Church. The place was passing through one of those periodical crises of reaction against an overdriven rationalism, which show themselves with tolerable regularity in any great centre of intellectual activity. It had begun to be recognised,

ROBERT ELSMERE

with a great burst of enthusiasm and astonishment, that, after all, Mill and Herbert Spencer had not said the last word on all things in heaven and earth. And now there was exaggerated recoil. A fresh wave of religious romanticism was fast gathering strength; the spirit of Newman had reappeared in the place which Newman had loved and left; religion was becoming once more popular among the most trivial souls, and a deep reality among a large proportion of the nobler ones.

With this movement of opinion Robert had very soon found himself in close and sympathetic contact. The meagre impression left upon his boyhood by the somewhat grotesque succession of the Harden curates, and by his mother's shafts of wit at their expense, was soon driven out of him by the stateliness and comely beauty of the Church order as it was revealed to him at Oxford. The religious air, the solemn beauty of the place itself, its innumerable associations with an organised and venerable faith, the great public functions and expressions of that faith, possessed the boy's imagination more and more. As he sat in the undergraduates' gallery at St. Mary's on the Sundays, when the great High Church preacher of the moment occupied the pulpit, and looked down on the crowded building, full of grave black-gowned figures, and framed in one continuous belt of closely packed, boyish faces; as he listened to the preacher's vibrating voice, rising and falling with the orator's instinct for musical effect; or as he stood up with the great surrounding body of undergraduates to send the melody of some Latin hymn rolling into the far recesses of the choir, the sight and the experience touched his inmost

The Towing-Path, Oxford



WESTMORELAND

feeling, and satisfied all the poetical and dramatic instincts of a passionate nature. The system behind the sight took stronger and stronger hold upon him; he began to wish ardently and continuously to become a part of it, to cast in his lot definitely with it.

One May evening he was wandering by himself along the towing-path which skirts the upper river, a prey to many thoughts, to forebodings about the schools which were to begin in three weeks, and to speculations as to how his mother would take the news of the second class, which he himself felt to be inevitable. Suddenly, for no apparent reason, there flashed into his mind the little conversation with his mother, which had taken place nearly four years before, in the garden at Trinity. He remembered the antagonism which the idea of a clerical life for him had raised in both of them, and a smile at his own ignorance and his mother's prejudice passed over his quick young face. He sat down on the grassy bank, a mass of reeds at his feet, the shadows of the poplars behind him lying across the still river; and opposite, the wide green expanse of the great town-meadow, dotted with white patches of geese and herds of grazing horses. There, with a sense of something solemn and critical passing over him, he began to dream out his future life.

And when he rose half an hour afterwards, and turned his steps homewards, he knew with an inward tremor of heart that the next great step of the way was practically taken. For there by the gliding river, and in view of the distant Oxford spires, which his fancy took to witness the act, he had vowed himself in prayer and self-abasement to the ministry of the Church.

ROBERT ELSMERE

During the three weeks that followed he made some frantic efforts to make up lost ground. He had not been idle for a single day, but he had been unwise, an intellectual spendthrift, living in a continuous succession of enthusiasms, and now at the critical moment his stock of nerve and energy was at a low ebb. He went in depressed and tired, his friends watching anxiously for the result. On the day of the Logic paper, as he emerged into the Schools quadrangle, he felt his arm caught by Mr. Grey.

‘Come with me for a walk, Elsmere; you look as if some air would do you good.’

Robert acquiesced, and the two men turned into the passageway leading out on to Radcliffe Square.

‘I have done for myself, sir,’ said the youth with a sigh, half impatience, half depression. ‘It seems to me to-day that I had neither mind nor memory. If I get a second I shall be lucky.’

‘Oh, you will get your second whatever happens,’ said Mr. Grey quietly, ‘and you must n’t be too much cast down about it if you don’t get your first.’

This implied acceptance of his partial defeat, coming from another’s lips, struck the excitable Robert like a lash. It was only what he had been saying to himself, but in the most pessimist forecasts we make for ourselves, there is always an under-protest of hope.

‘I have been wasting my time here lately,’ he said, hurriedly raising his college cap from his brows as if it oppressed them, and pushing his hair back with a weary restless gesture.

‘No,’ said Mr. Grey, turning his kind frank eyes upon him. ‘As far as general training goes, you have

WESTMORELAND

not wasted your time at all. There are many clever men who don't get a first class, and yet it is good for them to be here — so long as they are not loungers and idlers, of course. And you have not been a loungeur; you have been headstrong, and a little over-confident, perhaps,' — the speaker's smile took all the sting out of the words, — 'but you have grown into a man, and you are fit now for man's work. Don't let yourself be depressed, Elsmere. You will do better in life than you have done in examination.'

The young man was deeply touched. This tone of personal comment and admonition was very rare with Mr. Grey. He felt a sudden consciousness of a shared burden which was infinitely soothing, and though he made no answer, his face lost something of its harassed look as the two walked on together down Oriel Street and into Merton Meadows.

'Have you any immediate plans?' said Mr. Grey, as they turned into the Broad Walk, now in the full leafage of June, and rustling under a brisk western wind blowing from the river.

'No; at least I suppose it will be no good my trying for a Fellowship. But I meant to tell you, sir, of one thing — I have made up my mind to take orders.'

'You have? When?'

'Quite lately. So that fixes me, I suppose, to come back for divinity lectures in the autumn.'

Mr. Grey said nothing for a while, and they strolled in and out of the great shadows thrown by the elms across their path.

'You feel no difficulties in the way?' he asked at last, with a certain quick brusqueness of manner.

ROBERT ELSMERE

‘No,’ said Robert eagerly. ‘I never had any. Perhaps,’ he added, with a sudden humility, ‘it is because I have never gone deep enough. What I believe might have been worth more if I had had more struggle; but it has all seemed so plain.’

The young voice speaking with hesitation and reserve, and yet with a deep inner conviction, was pleasant to hear. Mr. Grey turned towards it, and the great eyes under the furrowed brow had a peculiar gentleness of expression.

‘You will probably be very happy in the life,’ he said. ‘The Church wants men of your sort.’

But through all the sympathy of the tone Robert was conscious of a veil between them. He knew, of course, pretty much what it was, and with a sudden impulse he felt that he would have given worlds to break through it and talk frankly with this man whom he revered beyond all others, wide as was the intellectual difference between them. But the tutor’s reticence and the younger man’s respect prevented it.

When the unlucky second class was actually proclaimed to the world, Langham took it to heart perhaps more than either Elsmere or his mother. No one knew better than he what Elsmere’s gifts were. It was absurd that he should not have made more of them in sight of the public. ‘*Le cléricalisme, voilà l’ennemi!*’ was about the gist of Langham’s mood during the days that followed on the class list.

Elsmere, however, did not divulge his intention of taking orders to him till ten days afterwards, when he had carried off Langham to stay at Harden, and he

The Broad Walk, Oxford



WESTMORELAND

and his old tutor were smoking in his mother's little garden one moonlit night.

When he had finished his statement Langham stood still a moment watching the wreaths of smoke as they curled and vanished. The curious interest in Elsmere's career, which during a certain number of months had made him almost practical, almost energetic, had disappeared. He was his own languid, paradoxical self.

'Well, after all,' he said at last, very slowly, 'the difficulty lies in preaching anything. One may as well preach a respectable mythology as anything else.'

'What do you mean by a mythology?' cried Robert hotly.

'Simply ideas, or experiences, personified,' said Langham, puffing away. 'I take it they are the subject-matter of all theologies.'

'I don't understand you,' said Robert, flushing. 'To the Christian, facts have been the medium by which ideas the world could not otherwise have come at have been communicated to man. Christian theology is a system of ideas indeed, but of ideas realised, made manifest in facts.'

Langham looked at him for a moment, undecided; then that suppressed irritation we have already spoken of broke through. 'How do you know they are facts?' he said drily.

The younger man took up the challenge with all his natural eagerness, and the conversation resolved itself into a discussion of Christian evidences. Or rather Robert held forth, and Langham kept him going by an occasional remark which acted like the prick of a spur. The tutor's psychological curiosity was soon satisfied.

ROBERT ELSMERE

He declared to himself that the intellect had precious little to do with Elsmere's Christianity. He had got hold of all the stock apologetic arguments, and used them, his companion admitted, with ability and ingenuity. But they were merely the outworks of the citadel. The inmost fortress was held by something wholly distinct from intellectual conviction — by moral passion, by love, by feeling, by that mysticism, in short, which no healthy youth should be without.

'He imagines he has satisfied his intellect,' was the inward comment of one of the most melancholy of sceptics, 'and he has never so much as exerted it. What a brute I am to protest!'

And suddenly Langham threw up the sponge. He held out his hand to his companion, a momentary gleam of tenderness in his black eyes, such as on one or two critical occasions before had disarmed the impetuous Elsmere.

'No use to discuss it further. You have a strong case, of course, and you have put it well. Only, when you are pegging away at reforming and enlightening the world, don't trample too much on the people who have more than enough to do to enlighten themselves.'

As to Mrs. Elsmere, in this new turn of her son's fortunes, she realised with humorous distinctness that for some years past Robert had been educating her as well as himself. Her old rebellious sense of something inherently absurd in the clerical status had been gradually slain in her by her long contact through him with the finer and more imposing aspects of church life. She was still on light skirmishing terms with

WESTMORELAND

the Harden curates, and at times she would flame out into the wildest, wittiest threats and gibes, for the momentary satisfaction of her own essentially lay instincts; but at bottom she knew perfectly well that, when the moment came, no mother could be more loyal, more easily imposed upon, than she would be.

‘I suppose, then, Robert, we shall be back at Murewell before very long,’ she said to him one morning abruptly, studying him the while out of her small twinkling eyes. What dignity there was already in the young lightly-built frame! what frankness and character in the irregular, attractive face!

‘Mother,’ cried Elsmere indignantly, ‘what do you take me for? Do you imagine I am going to bury myself in the country at five- or six-and-twenty, take six hundred a year, and nothing to do for it? That would be a deserter’s act indeed.’

Mrs. Elsmere shrugged her shoulders. ‘Oh, I supposed you would insist on killing yourself, to begin with. To most people nowadays that seems to be the necessary preliminary of a useful career.’

Robert laughed and kissed her, but her question had stirred him so much that he sat down that very evening to write to his cousin Mowbray Elsmere. He announced to him that he was about to read for orders, and that at the same time he relinquished all claim on the living of Murewell. ‘Do what you like with it when it falls vacant,’ he wrote, ‘without reference to me. My views are strong that before a clergyman in health and strength, and in no immediate want of money, allows himself the luxury of a country parish, he is bound, for some years at any rate, to meet the chal-

ROBERT ELSMERE

lence of evil and poverty where the fight is hardest — among our English town population.'

Sir Mowbray Elsmere replied curtly in a day or two to the effect that Robert's letter seemed to him superfluous. He, Sir Mowbray, had nothing to do with his cousin's views. When the living was vacant — the present holder, however, was uncommon tough and did not mean dying — he should follow out the instructions of his father's will, and if Robert did not want the thing he could say so.

In the autumn Robert and his mother went back to Oxford. The following spring he redeemed his Oxford reputation completely by winning a Fellowship at Merton after a brilliant fight with some of the best men of his year, and in June he was ordained.

In the summer term some teaching work was offered him at Merton, and by Mr. Grey's advice he accepted it, thus postponing for a while that London curacy and that stout grapple with human need at its sorest for which his soul was pining. 'Stay here a year or two,' Grey said bluntly; 'you are at the beginning of your best learning time, and you are not one of the natures who can do without books. You will be all the better worth having afterwards, and there is no lack of work here for a man's moral energies.'

Langham took the same line, and Elsmere submitted. Three happy and fruitful years followed. The young lecturer developed an amazing power of work. That concentration which he had been unable to achieve for himself his will was strong enough to maintain when it was a question of meeting the demands of a college class in which he was deeply interested.

WESTMORELAND

He became a stimulating and successful teacher, and one of the most popular of men. His passionate sense of responsibility towards his pupils made him load himself with burdens to which he was constantly physically unequal, and fill the vacations almost as full as the terms. And as he was comparatively a man of means, his generous impetuous temper was able to gratify itself in ways that would have been impossible to others. The story of his summer reading parties, for instance, if one could have unravelled it, would have been found to be one long string of acts of kindness towards men poorer and duller than himself.

At the same time he formed close and eager relations with the heads of the religious party in Oxford. His mother's Evangelical training of him and Mr. Grey's influence, together, perhaps, with certain drifts of temperament, prevented him from becoming a High Churchman. The sacramental, ceremonial view of the Church never took hold upon him. But to the English Church as a great national institution for the promotion of God's work on earth no one could have been more deeply loyal, and none coming close to him could mistake the fervour and passion of his Christian feeling. At the same time he did not know what rancour or bitterness meant, so that men of all shades of Christian belief reckoned a friend in him, and he went through life surrounded by an unusual, perhaps a dangerous amount of liking and affection. He threw himself ardently into the charitable work of Oxford, now helping a High Church vicar, and now toiling with Grey and one or two other Liberal Fellows, at the maintenance of a coffee-palace and lecture-room just

ROBERT ELSMERE

started by them in one of the suburbs; while in the second year of his lectureship the success of some first attempts at preaching fixed the attention of the religious leaders upon him as upon a man certain to make his mark.

So the three years passed — years not, perhaps, of great intellectual advance, for other forces in him than those of the intellect were mainly to the fore, but years certainly of continuous growth in character and moral experience. And at the end of them Mowbray Elsmere made his offer, and it was accepted.

The secret of it, of course, was overwork. Mrs. Elsmere, from the little house in Merton Street, where she had established herself, had watched her boy's meteoric career through these crowded months with very frequent misgivings. No one knew better than she that Robert was constitutionally not of the toughest fibre, and she realised long before he did that the Oxford life as he was bent on leading it must end for him in premature breakdown. But, as always happens, neither her remonstrances, nor Mr. Grey's common sense, nor Langham's fidgety protests had any effect on the young enthusiast to whom self-slaughter came so easy. During the latter half of his third year of teaching he was continually being sent away by the doctors, and coming back only to break down again. At last, in the January of his fourth year, the collapse became so decided that he consented, bribed by the prospect of the Holy Land, to go away for three months to Egypt and the East, accompanied by his mother and a college friend.

Just before their departure news reached him of the

WESTMORELAND

death of the rector of Murewell, followed by a formal offer of the living from Sir Mowbray. At the moment when the letter arrived he was feeling desperately tired and ill, and in after-life he never forgot the half-superstitious thrill and deep sense of depression with which he received it. For within him was a slowly-emerging, despairing conviction that he was indeed physically unequal to the claims of his Oxford work, and if so, still more unequal to grappling with the hardest pastoral labour and the worst forms of English poverty. And the coincidence of the Murewell incumbent's death struck his sensitive mind as a Divine leading.

But it was a painful defeat. He took the letter to Grey, and Grey strongly advised him to accept.

'You overdrive your scruples, Elsmere,' said the Liberal tutor with emphasis. 'No one can say a living with twelve hundred souls, and no curate, is a sine-cure. As for hard town work, it is absurd — you could n't stand it. And after all, I imagine, there are some souls worth saving out of the towns.'

Elsmere pointed out vindictively that family livings were a corrupt and indefensible institution. Mr. Grey replied calmly that they probably were, but that the fact did not affect, so far as he could see, Elsmere's competence to fulfil all the duties of rector of Murewell.

'After all, my dear fellow,' he said, a smile breaking over his strong expressive face, 'it is well even for reformers to be sane.'

Mrs. Elsmere was passive. It seemed to her that she had foreseen it all along. She was miserable about

ROBERT ELSMERE

his health, but she too had a moment of superstition, and would not urge him. Murewell was no name of happy omen to her — she had passed the darkest hours of her life there.

In the end Robert asked for delay, which was grudgingly granted him. Then he and his mother and friend fled overseas: he feverishly determined to get well and cheat the fates. But, after a halcyon time in Palestine and Constantinople, a whiff of poisoned air at Cannes, on their way home, acting on a low constitutional state, settled matters. Robert was laid up for weeks with malarious fever, and when he struggled out again into the hot Riviera sunshine it was clear to himself and everybody else that he must do what he could, and not what he would, in the Christian vineyard.

‘Mother,’ he said one day, suddenly looking up at her as she sat near him working, ‘can *you* be happy at Murewell?’

There was a wistfulness in the long thin face, and a pathetic accent of surrender in the voice, which hurt the mother’s heart.

‘I can be happy wherever you are,’ she said, laying her brown nervous hand on his blanched one.

‘Then give me pen and paper and let me write to Mowbray. I wonder whether the place has changed at all. Heigh ho! How is one to preach to people who have stuffed you up with gooseberries, or swung you on gates, or lifted you over puddles to save your petticoats? I wonder what has become of that boy whom I hit in the eye with my bow and arrow, or of that other lout who pummelled me into the middle of next

WESTMORELAND

week for disturbing his bird-trap! By the way, is the Squire — is Roger Wendover — living at the Hall now?’

He turned to his mother with a sudden start of interest.

‘So I hear,’ said Mrs. Elsmere drily. ‘*He* won’t be much good to you.’

He sat on meditating while she went for pen and paper. He had forgotten the Squire of Murewell. But Roger Wendover, the famous and eccentric owner of Murewell Hall, hermit and scholar, possessed of one of the most magnificent libraries in England, and author of books which had carried a revolutionary shock into the heart of English society, was not a figure to be overlooked by any rector of Murewell, least of all by one possessed of Robert’s culture and imagination.

The young man ransacked his memory on the subject with a sudden access of interest in his new home that was to be.

Six weeks later they were in England, and Robert, now convalescent, had accepted an invitation to spend a month in Long Whindale with his mother’s cousins, the Thornburghs, who offered him quiet, and bracing air. He was to enter on his duties at Murewell in July, the bishop, who had been made aware of his Oxford reputation, welcoming the new recruit to the diocese with marked warmth of manner.

CHAPTER VI

AGNES, if you want any tea, here it is,' cried Rose, calling from outside through the dining-room window; 'and tell mamma.'

It was the first of June, and the spell of warmth in which Robert Elsmere had arrived was still maintaining itself. An intelligent foreigner dropped into the flower-sprinkled valley might have believed that, after all, England, and even Northern England, had a summer. Early in the season as it was, the sun was already drawing the colour out of the hills; the young green, hardly a week or two old, was darkening. Except the oaks. They were brilliance itself against the luminous grey-blue sky. So were the beeches, their young downy leaves just unpacked, tumbling loosely open to the light. But the larches and the birches and the hawthorns were already sobered by a longer acquaintance with life and Phœbus.

Rose sat fanning herself with a portentous hat, which when in its proper place served her, apparently, both as hat and as parasol. She seemed to have been running races with a fine collie, who lay at her feet panting, but studying her with his bright eyes, and evidently ready to be off again at the first indication that his playmate had recovered her wind. Chattie was coming lazily over the lawn, stretching each leg behind her as she walked, tail arched, green eyes flaming in the sun, a model of treacherous beauty.

WESTMORELAND

‘Chattie, you fiend, come here!’ cried Rose, holding out a hand to her; ‘if Miss Barks were ever pretty she must have looked like you at this moment.’

‘I won’t have Chattie put upon,’ said Agnes, establishing herself at the other side of the little tea-table; ‘she has done you no harm. Come to me, beastie. I won’t compare you to disagreeable old maids.’

The cat looked from one sister to the other, blinking; then with a sudden magnificent spring leaped on to Agnes’s lap and curled herself up there.

‘Nothing but cupboard love,’ said Rose scornfully, in answer to Agnes’s laugh; ‘she knows you will give her bread-and-butter and I won’t, out of a double regard for my skirts and her morals. Oh, dear me! Miss Barks was quite seraphic last night; she never made a single remark about my clothes, and she did n’t even say to me as she generally does, with an air of compassion, that she “*quite* understands how hard it must be to keep in tune.”’

‘The amusing thing was Mrs. Seaton and Mr. Elsmere,’ said Agnes. ‘I just love, as Mrs. Thornburgh says, to hear her instructing other people in their own particular trades. She did n’t get much change out of him.’

Rose gave Agnes her tea, and then, bending forward, with one hand on her heart, said in a stage whisper, with a dramatic glance round the garden, ‘My heart is whole. How is yours?’

‘*Intact*,’ said Agnes calmly, ‘as that French bric-à-brac man in the Brompton Road used to say of his pots. But he is very nice.’

ROBERT ELSMERE

‘Oh, charming! But when my destiny arrives’ — and Rose, returning to her tea, swept her little hand with a teaspoon in it eloquently round — ‘he won’t have his hair cut close. I must have luxuriant locks, and I will take *no* excuse! *Une chevelure de poète*, the eye of an eagle, the moustache of a hero, the hand of a Rubinstein, and, if it pleases him, the temper of a fiend. He will be odious, insufferable for all the world besides, except for me; and for me he will be heaven.’

She threw herself back, a twinkle in her bright eye, but a little flush of something half-real on her cheek.

‘No doubt,’ said Agnes drily. ‘But you can’t wonder if under the circumstances I don’t pine for a brother-in-law. To return to the subject, however, Catherine liked him. She said so.’

‘Oh, that does n’t count,’ replied Rose discontentedly; ‘Catherine likes everybody — of a certain sort — and everybody likes Catherine.’

‘Does that mean, Miss Hasty,’ said her sister, ‘that you have made up your mind Catherine will never marry?’

‘Marry!’ cried Rose. ‘You might as well talk of marrying Westminster Abbey.’

Agnes looked at her attentively. Rose’s fun had a decided lack of sweetness. ‘After all,’ she said demurely, ‘Saint Elizabeth married.’

‘Yes, but then she was a princess. Reasons of State. If Catherine were “her Royal Highness” it would be her duty to marry, which would just make *all* the difference. Duty! I hate the word.’

And Rose took up a fir-cone lying near and threw it at the nose of the collie, who made a jump at it, and

WESTMORELAND

then resumed an attitude of blinking and dignified protest against his mistress's follies.

Agnes again studied her sister. 'What's the matter with you, Rose?'

'The usual thing, my dear,' replied Rose curtly, 'only more so. I had a letter this morning from Carry Ford — the daughter, you know, of those nice people I stayed in Manchester with last year. Well, she wants me to go and stay the winter with them and study under a first-rate man, Franzen, who is to be in Manchester two days a week during the winter. I have n't said a word about it — what's the use? I know all Catherine's arguments by heart. Manchester is not Whindale, and papa wished us to live in Whindale; I am not somebody else and need n't earn my bread; and art is not religion; and —'

'Wheels!' exclaimed Agnes. 'Catherine, I suppose, home from Whinborough.'

Rose got up and peered through the rhododendron bushes at the top of the wall which shut them off from the road.

'Catherine, and an unknown. Catherine driving at a foot's pace, and the unknown walking beside her. Oh, I see, of course — Mr. Elsmere. He will come in to tea, so I'll go for a cup. It is his duty to call on us to-day.'

When Rose came back in the wake of her mother, Catherine and Robert Elsmere were coming up the drive. Something had given Catherine more colour than usual, and as Mrs. Leyburn shook hands with the young clergyman her mother's eyes turned approvingly to her eldest daughter. 'After all, she is as hand-

ROBERT ELSMERE

some as Rose,' she said to herself — 'though it is quite a different style.'

Rose, who was always tea-maker, dispensed her wares; Catherine took her favourite low seat beside her mother, clasping Mrs. Leyburn's thin mittened hand a while tenderly in her own; Robert and Agnes set up a lively gossip on the subject of the Thornburghs' guests, in which Rose joined, while Catherine looked smiling on. She seemed apart from the rest, Robert thought; not, clearly, by her own will, but by virtue of a difference of temperament which could not but make itself felt. Yet once as Rose passed her, Robert saw her stretch out her hand and touch her sister caressingly, with a bright upward look and smile as though she would say, 'Is all well? have you had a good time this afternoon, Röschen?' Clearly the strong contemplative nature was not strong enough to dispense with any of the little wants and cravings of human affection. Compared to the main impression she was making on him, her suppliant attitude at her mother's feet and her caress of her sister were like flowers breaking through the stern March soil and changing the whole spirit of the fields.

Presently he said something of Oxford, and mentioned Merton. Instantly Mrs. Leyburn fell upon him. Had he ever seen Mr. S—— who had been a Fellow there, and Rose's godfather?

'I don't acknowledge him,' said Rose, pouting. 'Other people's godfathers give them mugs and corals. Mine never gave me anything but a Concordance.'

Robert laughed, and proved to their satisfaction that Mr. S—— had been extinct before his day. But

WESTMORELAND

could they ask him any other questions? Mrs. Leyburn became quite animated, and, diving into her memory, produced a number of fragmentary reminiscences of her husband's Queen's friends, asking him for information about each and all of them. The young man disentangled all her questions, racked his brains to answer, and showed all through a quick friendliness, a charming deference as of youth to age, which confirmed the liking of the whole party for him. Then the mention of an associate of Richard Leyburn's youth, who had been one of the Tractarian leaders, led him into talk of Oxford changes and the influences of the present. He drew for them the famous High Church preacher of the moment, described the great spectacle of his Bampton Lectures, by which Oxford had been recently thrilled, and gave a dramatic account of a sermon on evolution preached by the hermit-veteran Pusey, as though by another Elias returning to the world to deliver a last warning message to men. Catherine listened absorbed, her deep eyes fixed upon him. And though all he said was pitched in a vivacious narrative key and addressed as much to the others as to her, inwardly it seemed to him that his one object all through was to touch and keep her attention.

Then, in answer to inquiries about himself, he fell to describing St. Anselm's with enthusiasm, — its growth, its Provost, its effectiveness as a great educational machine, the impression it had made on Oxford and the country. This led him naturally to talk of Mr. Grey, then, next to the Provost, the most prominent figure in the College; and once embarked on this theme

ROBERT ELSMERE

he became more eloquent and interesting than ever. The circle of women listened to him as to a voice from the large world. He made them feel the beat of the great currents of English life and thought; he seemed to bring the stir and rush of our central English society into the deep quiet of their valley. Even the bright-haired Rose, idly swinging her pretty foot, with a head full of dreams and discontent, was beguiled, and for the moment seemed to lose her restless self in listening.

He told an exciting story of a bad election riot in Oxford which had been quelled at considerable personal risk by Mr. Grey, who had gained his influence in the town by a devotion of years to the policy of breaking down as far as possible the old venomous feud between city and university.

When he paused, Mrs. Leyburn said, vaguely, 'Did you say he was a canon of somewhere?'

'Oh no,' said Robert, smiling, 'he is not a clergyman.'

'But you said he preached,' said Agnes.

'Yes—but lay sermons—addresses. He is not one of us even, according to your standard and mine.'

'A Nonconformist?' sighed Mrs. Leyburn. 'Oh, I know they have let in everybody now.'

'Well, if you like,' said Robert. 'What I meant was that his opinions are not orthodox. He could not be a clergyman, but he is one of the noblest of men!'

He spoke with affectionate warmth. Then suddenly Catherine's eyes met his, and he felt an involuntary start. A veil had fallen over them; her sweet moved sympathy was gone; she seemed to have shrunk into herself.

WESTMORELAND

She turned to Mrs. Leyburn. 'Mother, do you know, I have all sorts of messages from Aunt Ellen' — and in an under-voice she began to give Mrs. Leyburn the news of her afternoon expedition.

Rose and Agnes soon plunged young Elsmere into another stream of talk. But he kept his feeling of perplexity. His experience of other women seemed to give him nothing to go upon with regard to Miss Leyburn.

Presently Catherine got up and drew her plain little black cape round her again.

'My dear!' remonstrated Mrs. Leyburn. 'Where are you off to now?'

'To the Backhouses, mother,' she said in a low voice; 'I have not been there for two days. I must go this evening.'

Mrs. Leyburn said no more. Catherine's 'musts' were never disputed. She moved towards Elsmere with outstretched hand. But he also sprang up.

'I, too, must be going,' he said; 'I have paid you an unconscionable visit. If you are going past the vicarage, Miss Leyburn, may I escort you so far?'

She stood quietly waiting while he made his farewells. Agnes, whose eye fell on her sister during the pause, was struck with a passing sense of something out of the common. She could hardly have defined her impression, but Catherine seemed more alive to the outer world, more like other people, less nun-like, than usual.

When they had left the garden together, as they had come into it, and Mrs. Leyburn, complaining of chilliness, had retreated to the drawing-room, Rose laid a quick hand on her sister's arm.

ROBERT ELSMERE

‘You say Catherine likes him? Owl! what is a great deal more certain is that he likes her.’

‘Well,’ said Agnes calmly, — ‘well, I await your remarks.’

‘Poor fellow!’ said Rose grimly, and removed her hand.

Meanwhile Elsmere and Catherine walked along the valley road towards the vicarage. He thought, uneasily, she was a little more reserved with him than she had been in those pleasant moments after he had overtaken her in the pony-carriage; but still she was always kind, always courteous. And what a white hand it was, hanging ungloved against her dress! what a beautiful dignity and freedom, as of mountain winds and mountain streams, in every movement!

‘You are bound for High Ghyll?’ he said to her as they neared the vicarage gate. ‘Is it not a long way for you? You have been at a meeting already, your sister said, and teaching this morning!’

He looked down on her with a charming diffidence as though aware that their acquaintance was very young, and yet with a warm eagerness of feeling piercing through. As she paused under his eye the slightest flush rose to Catherine’s cheek. Then she looked up with a smile. It was amusing to be taken care of by this tall stranger!

‘It is most unfeminine, I am afraid,’ she said, ‘but I could n’t be tired if I tried.’

Elsmere grasped her hand.

‘You make me feel myself more than ever a shocking example,’ he said, letting it go with a little sigh. The smart of his own renunciation was still keen in him.

WESTMORELAND

She lingered a moment, could find nothing to say, threw him a look all shy sympathy and lovely pity, and was gone.

In the evening Robert got an explanation of that sudden stiffening in his auditor of the afternoon, which had perplexed him. He and the vicar were sitting smoking in the study after dinner, and the ingenious young man managed to shift the conversation on to the Leyburns, as he had managed to shift it once or twice before that day, flattering himself, of course, on each occasion that his manœuvres were beyond detection. The vicar, good soul, by virtue of his original discovery, detected them all, and with a sense of appropriation in the matter, not at all unmixed with a sense of triumph over Mrs. T., kept the ball rolling merrily.

‘Miss Leyburn seems to have very strong religious views,’ said Robert, *à propos* of some remark of the vicar’s as to the assistance she was to him in the school.

‘Ah, she is her father’s daughter,’ said the vicar genially. He had his oldest coat on, his favourite pipe between his lips, and a bit of domestic carpentering on his knee at which he was fiddling away; and, being perfectly happy, was also perfectly amiable. ‘Richard Leyburn was a fanatic — as mild as you please, but immoveable.’

‘What line?’

‘Evangelical, with a dash of Quakerism. He lent me Madame Guyon’s Life once to read. I did n’t appreciate it. I told him that for all her religion she seemed to me to have a deal of the vixen in her. He could hardly get over it: it nearly broke our friendship.

ROBERT ELSMERE

But I suppose he was very like her, except that, in my opinion, his nature was sweeter. He was a fatalist — saw leadings of Providence in every little thing. And such a dreamer! When he came to live up here just before his death, and all his active life was taken off him, I believe half his time he was seeing visions. He used to wander over the fells and meet you with a start, as though you belonged to another world than the one he was walking in.'

'And his eldest daughter was much with him?'

'The apple of his eye. She understood him. He could talk his soul out to her. The others, of course, were children; and his wife — well, his wife was just what you see her now, poor thing. He must have married her when she was very young and very pretty. She was a squire's daughter somewhere near the school of which he was master — a good family, I believe — she'll tell you so, in a ladylike way. He was always fidgety about her health. He loved her, I suppose, or had loved her. But it was Catherine who had his mind; Catherine who was his friend. She adored him. I believe there was always a sort of pity in her heart for him too. But at any rate he made her and trained her. He poured all his ideas and convictions into her.'

'Which were strong?'

'Uncommonly. For all his gentle, ethereal look, you could neither bend nor break him. I don't believe anybody but Richard Leyburn could have gone through Oxford at the height of the Oxford Movement, and, so to speak, have known nothing about it, while living all the time for religion. He had a great deal in common with the Quakers, as I said; a great deal in

WESTMORELAND

common with the Wesleyans; but he was very loyal to the Church all the same. He regarded it as the golden mean. George Herbert was his favourite poet. He used to carry his poems about with him on the mountains, and an expurgated "Christian Year" — the only thing he ever took from the High Churchmen — which he had made for himself, and which he and Catherine knew by heart. In some ways he was not a bigot at all. He would have had the Church make peace with the Dissenters; he was all for upsetting tests so far as Nonconformity was concerned. But he drew the most rigid line between belief and unbelief. He would not have dined at the same table with a Unitarian if he could have helped it. I remember a furious article of his in the "Record" against admitting Unitarians to the Universities or allowing them to sit in Parliament. England is a Christian State, he said; they are not Christians; they have no right in her except on sufferance. Well, I suppose he was about right,' said the vicar, with a sigh. 'We are all so half-hearted nowadays.'

'Not he,' cried Robert hotly. 'Who are we that because a man differs from us in opinion we are to shut him out from the education of political and civil duty? But never mind, Cousin William. Go on.'

'There's no more that I remember, except that of course Catherine took all these ideas from him. He would n't let his children know any unbeliever, however apparently worthy and good. He impressed it upon them as their special sacred duty, in a time of wicked enmity to religion, to cherish the faith and the whole faith. He wished his wife and daughters to live

ROBERT ELSMERE

on here after his death that they might be less in danger spiritually than in the big world, and that they might have more opportunity of living the old-fashioned Christian life. There was also some mystical idea, I think, of making up through his children for the godless lives of their forefathers. He used to reproach himself for having in his prosperous days neglected his family, some of whom he might have helped to raise.'

'Well, but,' said Robert, 'all very well for Miss Leyburn, but I don't see the father in the two younger girls.'

'Ah, there is Catherine's difficulty,' said the vicar, shrugging his shoulders. 'Poor thing! How well I remember her after her father's death! She came down to see me in the dining-room about some arrangement for the funeral. She was only sixteen, so pale and thin with nursing. I said something about the comfort she had been to her father. She took my hand and burst into tears. "He was so good!" she said; "I loved him so! Oh, Mr. Thornburgh, help me to look after the others!" And that's been her one thought since then — that, next to following the narrow road.'

The vicar had begun to speak with emotion, as generally happened to him whenever he was beguiled into much speech about Catherine Leyburn. There must have been something great somewhere in the insignificant elderly man. A meaner soul might so easily have been jealous of this girl with her inconveniently high standards, and her influence, surpassing his own, in his own domain.

'I should like to know the secret of the little musician's independence,' said Robert, musing. 'There

WESTMORELAND

might be no tie of blood at all between her and the elder, so far as I can see.'

'Oh, I don't know that! There's more than you think, or Catherine would n't have kept her hold over her so far as she has. Generally she gets her way, except about the music. There Rose sticks to it.'

'And why should n't she?'

'Ah, well, you see, my dear fellow, I am old enough, and you're not, to remember what people in the old days used to think about art. Of course nowadays we all say very fine things about it; but Richard Leyburn would no more have admitted that a girl who had n't got her own bread or her family's to earn by it was justified in spending her time in fiddling than he would have approved of her spending it in dancing. I have heard him take a text out of the 'Imitation' and lecture Rose when she was quite a baby for pestering any stray person she could get hold of to give her music-lessons. "Woe to them" — yes, that was it — "that inquire many curious things of men, and care little about the way of serving me." However, he was n't consistent. Nobody is. It was actually he that brought Rose her first violin from London in a green baize bag. Mrs. Leyburn took me in one night to see her asleep with it on her pillow, and all her pretty curls lying over the strings. I dare say, poor man, it was one of the acts towards his children that tormented his mind in his last hour.'

'She has certainly had her way about practising it: she plays superbly.'

'Oh yes, she has had her way. She is a queer mixture, is Rose. I see a touch of the old Leyburn reck-

ROBERT ELSMERE

lessness in her; and then there is the beauty and refinement of her mother's side of the family. Lately she has got quite out of hand. She went to stay with some relations they have in Manchester, got drawn into the musical set there, took to these funny gowns, and now she and Catherine are always half at war. Poor Catherine said to me the other day, with tears in her eyes, that she knew Rose thought her as hard as iron. "But what can I do?" she said. "I promised papa." She makes herself miserable, and it's no use. I wish the little wild thing would get herself well married. She's not meant for this humdrum place, and she may kick over the traces.'

'She's pretty enough for anything and anybody,' said Robert.

The vicar looked at him sharply, but the young man's critical and meditative look reassured him.

The next day, just before early dinner, Rose and Agnes, who had been for a walk, were startled, as they were turning into their own gate, by the frantic waving of a white handkerchief from the vicarage garden. It was Mrs. Thornburgh's accepted way of calling the attention of the Burwood inmates, and the girls walked on. They found the good lady waiting for them in the drive in a characteristic glow and flutter.

'My dears, I have been looking out for you all the morning! I should have come over but for the stores coming, and a tiresome man from Randall's. I've had to bargain with him for a whole hour about taking back those sweets. I was swindled, of course, but we should have died if we'd had to eat them up. Well, now, my dears —'

WESTMORELAND

The vicar's wife paused. Her square short figure was between the two girls; she had an arm of each, and she looked significantly from one to another, her grey curls flapping across her face as she did so.

'Go on, Mrs. Thornburgh,' cried Rose. 'You make us quite nervous.'

'How do you like Mr. Elsmere?' she inquired solemnly.

'Very much,' said both in chorus.

Mrs. Thornburgh surveyed Rose's smiling frankness with a little sigh. Things were going grandly, but she could imagine a disposition of affairs which would have given her personally more pleasure.

'*How — would — you — like —* him for a brother-in-law?' she inquired, beginning in a whisper, with slow emphasis, patting Rose's arm, and bringing out the last words with a rush.

Agnes caught the twinkle in Rose's eye, but she answered for them both demurely.

'We have no objection to entertain the idea. But you must explain.'

'Explain!' cried Mrs. Thornburgh. 'I should think it explains itself. At least if you'd been in this house the last twenty-four hours you'd think so. Since the moment when he first met her, it's been "Miss Leyburn," "Miss Leyburn," all the time. One might have seen it with half an eye from the beginning.'

Mrs. Thornburgh had not seen it with two eyes, as we know, till it was pointed out to her; but her imagination worked with equal liveliness backwards or forwards.

'He went to see you yesterday, did n't he — yes,

ROBERT ELSMERE

I know he did — and he overtook her in the pony-carriage — the vicar saw them from across the valley — and he brought her back from your house, and then he kept William up till nearly twelve talking of her. And now he wants a picnic. Oh, it's as plain as a pikestaff. And, my dears, *nothing* to be said against him. Fifteen hundred a year if he's a penny. A nice living, only his mother to look after, and as good a young fellow as ever stepped.'

Mrs. Thornburgh stopped, choked almost by her own eloquence. The girls, who had by this time established her between them on a garden-seat, looked at her with smiling composure. They were accustomed to letting her have her budget out.

'And now, of course,' she resumed, taking breath, and chilled a little by their silence, 'now, of course, I want to know about Catherine?' She regarded them with anxious interrogation. Rose, still smiling, slowly shook her head.

'What!' cried Mrs. Thornburgh; then, with charming inconsistency, 'oh, you can't know anything in two days.'

'That's just it,' said Agnes, intervening; 'we can't know anything in two days. No one ever will know anything about Catherine, if she takes to anybody, till the last minute.'

Mrs. Thornburgh's face fell. 'It's very difficult when people will be so reserved,' she said dolefully.

The girls acquiesced, but intimated that they saw no way out of it.

'At any rate we can bring them together,' she broke out, brightening again. 'We can have picnics, you

WESTMORELAND

know, and teas, and all that — and watch. Now listen.'

And the vicar's wife sketched out a programme of festivities for the next fortnight she had been revolving in her inventive head, which took the sisters' breath away. Rose bit her lip to keep in her laughter. Agnes with vast self-possession took Mrs. Thornburgh in hand. She pointed out firmly that nothing would be so likely to make Catherine impracticable as fuss. 'In vain is the net spread,' etc. She preached from the text with a worldly wisdom which quickly crushed Mrs. Thornburgh.

'Well, *what* am I to do, my dears?' she said at last helplessly. 'Look at the weather! We must have some picnics, if it's only to amuse Robert.'

Mrs. Thornburgh spent her life between a condition of effervescence and a condition of feeling the world too much for her. Rose and Agnes, having now reduced her to the latter state, proceeded cautiously to give her her head again. They promised her two or three expeditions and one picnic at least; they said they would do their best; they promised they would report what they saw and be very discreet, both feeling the comedy of Mrs. Thornburgh as the advocate of discretion; and then they departed to their early dinner, leaving the vicar's wife decidedly less self-confident than they found her.

'The first matrimonial excitement of the family,' cried Agnes as they walked home. 'So far no one can say the Miss Leyburns have been besieged!'

'It will be all moonshine,' Rose replied decisively. 'Mr. Elsmere may lose his heart; we may aid and abet

ROBERT ELSMERE

him; Catherine will live in the clouds for a few weeks, and come down from them at the end with the air of an angel, to give him his *coup de grâce*. As I said before — poor fellow!’

Agnes made no answer. She was never so positive as Rose, and on the whole did not find herself the worse for it in life. Besides, she understood that there was a soreness at the bottom of Rose’s heart that was always showing itself in unexpected connexions.

There was no necessity, indeed, for elaborate schemes for assisting Providence. Mrs. Thornburgh had her picnics and her expeditions, but without them Robert Elsmere would have been still man enough to see Catherine Leyburn every day. He loitered about the roads along which she must needs pass to do her many offices of charity; he offered the vicar to take a class in the school, and was naïvely exultant that the vicar curiously happened to fix an hour when he must needs see Miss Leyburn going or coming on the same errand; he dropped into Burwood on any conceivable pretext, till Rose and Agnes lost all inconvenient respect for his cloth and Mrs. Leyburn sent him on errands; and he even insisted that Catherine and the vicar should make use of him and his pastoral services in one or two of the cases of sickness or poverty under their care. Catherine, with a little more reserve than usual, took him one day to the Tysons’, and introduced him to the poor crippled son who was likely to live on paralysed for some time, under the weight, moreover, of a black cloud of depression which seldom lifted. Mrs. Tyson kept her talking in the room, and she never forgot the scene. It showed her a new aspect

WESTMORELAND

of a man whose intellectual life was becoming plain to her, while his moral life was still something of a mystery. The look in Elsmere's face as he sat bending over the maimed young farmer, the strength and tenderness of the man, the diffidence of the few religious things he said, and yet the reality and force of them, struck her powerfully. He had forgotten her, forgotten everything save the bitter human need, and the comfort it was his privilege to offer. Catherine stood answering Mrs. Tyson at random, the tears rising in her eyes. She slipped out while he was still talking, and went home strangely moved.

As to the festivities, she did her best to join in them. The sensitive soul often reproached itself afterwards for having juggled in the matter. Was it not her duty to manage a little society and gaiety for her sisters sometimes? Her mother could not undertake it, and was always plaintively protesting that Catherine would not be young. So for a short week or two Catherine did her best to be young, and climbed the mountain grass, or forded the mountain streams with the energy and the grace of perfect health, trembling afterwards at night as she knelt by her window to think how much sheer pleasure the day had contained. Her life had always had the tension of a bent bow. It seemed to her once or twice during this fortnight as though something were suddenly relaxed in her, and she felt a swift Bunyan-like terror of backsliding, of falling away. But she never confessed herself fully; she was even blind to what her perspicacity would have seen so readily in another's case — the little arts and manœuvres of those about her. It did not strike

ROBERT ELSMERE

her that Mrs. Thornburgh was more flighty and more ebullient than ever; that the vicar's wife kissed her at odd times, and with a quite unwonted effusion; or that Agnes and Rose, when they were in the wild heart of the mountains, or wandering far and wide in search of sticks for a picnic fire, showed a perfect genius for avoiding Mr. Elsmere, whom both of them liked, and that in consequence his society almost always fell to her. Nor did she ever analyse what would have been the attraction of those walks to her without that tall figure at her side, that bounding step, that picturesque impetuous talk. There are moments when Nature throws a kind of heavenly mist and dazzlement round the soul it would fain make happy. The soul gropes blindly on; if it saw its way it might be timid and draw back, but kind powers lead it genially onward through a golden darkness.

Meanwhile if she did not know herself, she and Elsmere learnt with wonderful quickness and thoroughness to know each other. The two households so near together, and so isolated from the world besides, were necessarily in constant communication. And Elsmere made a most stirring element in their common life. Never had he been more keen, more strenuous. It gave Catherine new lights on modern character altogether to see how he was preparing himself for this Surrey living — reading up the history, geology, and botany of the Weald and its neighbourhood, plunging into reports of agricultural commissions, or spending his quick brain on village sanitation, with the oddest results sometimes, so far as his conversation was concerned. And then in the middle of his disquisitions,

WESTMORELAND

which would keep her breathless with a sense of being whirled through space at the tail of an electric kite, the kite would come down with a run, and the preacher and reformer would come hat in hand to the girl beside him, asking her humbly to advise him, to pour out on him some of that practical experience of hers among the poor and suffering, for the sake of which he would in an instant scornfully fling out of sight all his own magnificent plannings. Never had she told so much of her own life to any one; her consciousness of it sometimes filled her with a sort of terror, lest she might have been trading, as it were, for her own advantage on the sacred things of God. But he would have it. His sympathy, his sweetness, his quick spiritual feeling drew the stories out of her. And then how his bright frank eyes would soften! With what a reverence would he touch her hand when she said good-bye!

And on her side she felt that she knew almost as much about Murewell as he did. She could imagine the wild beauty of the Surrey heathland, she could see the white square rectory with its sloping walled garden, the juniper common just outside the straggling village; she could even picture the strange squire, solitary in the great Tudor Hall, the author of terrible books against the religion of Christ of which she shrank from hearing, and share the anxieties of the young rector as to his future relations towards a personality so marked, and so important to every soul in the little community he was called to rule. Here all was plain sailing; she understood him perfectly, and her gentle comments, or her occasional sarcasms, were friendliness itself.

ROBERT ELSMERE

But it was when he turned to larger things — to books, movements, leaders of the day — that she was often puzzled, sometimes distressed. Why would he seem to exalt and glorify rebellion against the established order in the person of Mr. Grey? Or why, ardent as his own faith was, would he talk as though opinion was a purely personal matter, hardly in itself to be made the subject of moral judgement at all, and as though right belief were a blessed privilege and boon rather than a law and an obligation? When his comments on men and things took this tinge, she would turn silent, feeling a kind of painful opposition between his venturesome speech and his clergyman's dress.

And yet, as we all know, these ways of speech were not his own. He was merely talking the natural Christian language of this generation; whereas she, the child of a mystic — solitary, intense, and deeply reflective from her earliest youth — was still thinking and speaking in the language of her father's generation.

But although, as often as his unwariness brought him near to these points of jarring, he would hurry away from them, conscious that here was the one profound difference between them, it was clear to him that insensibly she had moved farther than she knew from her father's standpoint. Even among these solitudes, far from men and literature, she had unconsciously felt the breath of her time in some degree. As he penetrated deeper into the nature he found it honeycombed, as it were, here and there, with beautiful unexpected softnesses and diffidences. Once, after

WESTMORELAND

a long walk, as they were lingering homewards under a cloudy evening sky, he came upon the great problem of her life — Rose and Rose's art. He drew her difficulty from her with the most delicate skill. She had laid it bare, and was blushing to think how she had asked his counsel almost before she knew where their talk was leading. How was it lawful for the Christian to spend the few short years of the earthly combat in any pursuit, however noble and exquisite, which merely aimed at the gratification of the senses, and implied in the pursuer the emphasising rather than the surrender of self?

He argued it very much as Kingsley would have argued it, tried to lift her to a more intelligent view of a multifarious world, dwelling on the function of pure beauty in life, and on the influence of beauty on character, pointing out the value to the race of all individual development, and pressing home on her the natural religious question: How are the artistic aptitudes to be explained unless the Great Designer meant them to have a use and function in His world? She replied doubtfully that she had always supposed they were lawful for recreation, and like any other trade for bread-winning, but —

Then he told her much that he knew about the humanising effect of music on the poor. He described to her the efforts of a London society, of which he was a subscribing member, to popularise the best music among the lowest class; he dwelt almost with passion on the difference between the joy to be got out of such things and the common brutalising joys of the workman. And you could not have art without artists. In

ROBERT ELSMERE

this again he was only talking the commonplaces of his day. But to her they were not commonplaces at all. She looked at him from time to time, her great eyes lightening and deepening as it seemed with every fresh thrust of his.

‘I am grateful to you,’ she said at last with an involuntary outburst, ‘I am *very* grateful to you!’

And she gave a long sigh as if some burden she had long borne in patient silence had been loosened a little, if only by the fact of speech about it. She was not convinced exactly. She was too strong a nature to relinquish a principle without a period of meditative struggle in which conscience should have all its dues. But her tone made his heart leap. He felt in it a momentary self-surrender that, coming from a creature of so rare a dignity, filled him with an exquisite sense of power, and yet at the same time with a strange humility beyond words.

A day or two later he was the spectator of a curious little scene. An aunt of the Leyburns living in Whinborough came to see them. She was their father’s youngest sister, and the wife of a man who had made some money as a builder in Whinborough. When Robert came in he found her sitting on the sofa having tea, a large homely-looking woman with grey hair, a high brow, and prominent white teeth. She had unfastened her bonnet-strings, and a clean white handkerchief lay spread out on her lap. When Elsmere was introduced to her, she got up, and said with some effusiveness, and a distinct Westmoreland accent —

‘Very pleased indeed to make your acquaintance, sir,’ while she enclosed his fingers in a capacious hand.

WESTMORELAND

Mrs. Leyburn, looking fidgety and uncomfortable, was sitting near her, and Catherine, the only member of the party who showed no sign of embarrassment when Robert entered, was superintending her aunt's tea and talking busily the while.

Robert sat down at a little distance beside Agnes and Rose, who were chattering together a little artificially and of set purpose as it seemed to him. But the aunt was not to be ignored. She talked too loud not to be overheard, and Agnes inwardly noted that as soon as Robert Elsmere appeared she talked louder than before. He gathered presently that she was an ardent Wesleyan, and that she was engaged in describing to Catherine and Mrs. Leyburn the evangelistic exploits of her eldest son, who had recently obtained his first circuit as a Wesleyan minister. He was shrewd enough, too, to guess, after a minute or two, that his presence and probably his obnoxious clerical dress gave additional zest to the recital.

'Oh, his success at Colesbridge has been somethin' marvellous,' he heard her say, with uplifted hands and eyes, 'some-thin' marvellous. The Lord has blessed him indeed! It does n't matter what it is, whether it's meetin's, or sermons, or parlour work, or just faithful dealin's with souls one by one. Satan has no cliverer foe than Edward. He never shuts his eyes; as Edward says himself, it's like trackin' for game is huntin' for souls. Why, the other day he was walkin' out from Coventry to a service. It was the Sabbath, and he saw a man in a bit of grass by the roadside, mendin' his cart. And he stopped did Edward, and gave him the Word *strong*. The man seemed puzzled like, and said

ROBERT ELSMERE

he meant no harm. "No harm!" says Edward, "when you're just doin' the Devil's work every nail you put in, and hammerin' away, mon, at your own damnation." But here's his letter.' And while Rose turned away to a far window to hide an almost hysterical inclination to laugh, Mrs. Fleming opened her bag, took out a treasured paper, and read with the emphasis and the unction peculiar to a certain type of revivalism —

' "Poor sinner! He was much put about. I left him, praying the Lord my shaft might rankle in him; aye, might fester and burn in him till he found no peace but in Jesus. He seemed very dark and destitute — no respect for the Word or its ministers. A bit farther I met a boy carrying a load of turnips. To him, too, I was faithful, and he went on, taking, without knowing it, a precious leaflet with him in his bag. Glorious work! If Wesleyans will but go on claiming even the highways for God, sin will skulk yet."'

A dead silence. Mrs. Fleming folded up the letter and put it back into her bag.

'There's your true minister,' she said, with a large judicial utterance as she closed the snap. 'Wherever he goes Edward must have souls!'

And she threw a swift searching look at the young clergyman in the window.

'He must have very hard work with so much walking and preaching,' said Catherine gently.

Somehow, as soon as she spoke, Elsmere saw the whole odd little scene with other eyes.

'His work is just wearin' him out,' said the mother fervently; 'but a minister does n't think of that. Wherever he goes there are sinners saved. He stayed

WESTMORELAND

last week at a house near Nuneaton. At family prayer alone there were five saved. And at the prayer-meetin's on the Sabbath such outpourin's of the Spirit! Edward comes home, his wife tells me, just ready to drop. Are you acquainted, sir,' she added, turning suddenly to Elsmere, and speaking in a certain tone of provocation, 'with the labours of our Wesleyan ministers?'

'No,' said Robert, with his pleasant smile, 'not personally. But I have the greatest respect for them as a body of devoted men.'

The look of battle faded from the woman's face. It was not an unpleasant face. He even saw strange reminiscences of Catherine in it at times.

'You're aboot right there, sir. Not that they dare take any credit to themselves — it's grace, sir, all grace.'

'Aunt Ellen,' said Catherine, while a sudden light broke over her face; 'I just want you to take Edward a little story from me. Ministers are good things, but God can do without them.'

And she laid her hand on her aunt's knee with a smile in which there was the slightest touch of affectionate satire.

'I was up among the fells the other day,' she went on; 'I met an elderly man cutting wood in a plantation, and I stopped and asked him how he was. "Ah, Miss," he said, "verra weel, verrra weel. And yet it was nobbut Friday morning lasst, I cam oop here, awfu' bad in my sperrits like. For my wife she's sick, an' a' dwinnelt away, and I'm gettin' auld, and can't wark as I'd used to, and it did luke to me as thoo there

ROBERT ELSMERE

was naethin' afore us nobbut t' Union. And t' mist war low on t' fells, and I sat oonder t' wall, wettish and broodin' like. And theer — all ov a soodent the Lord found me! Yes, puir Reuben Judge, as dawn't matter to naebody, the Lord found un. It war leyke as thoo His feeace cam a-glisterin' an' a-shinin' through t' mist. An' iver sence then, Miss, aa've jest felt as thoo aa could a' cut an' stackt all t' wood on t' fell in naw time at a'!" And he waved his hand round the mountain-side which was covered with plantation. And all the way along the path for ever so long I could hear him singing, chopping away, and quavering out, "Rock of Ages."

She paused, her delicate face, with just a little quiver in the lip, turned to her aunt, her eyes glowing as though a hidden fire had leapt suddenly outward. And yet the gesture, the attitude, was simplicity and unconsciousness itself. Robert had never heard her say anything so intimate before. Nor had he ever seen her so inspired, so beautiful. She had transmuted the conversation at a touch. It had been barbarous prose; she had turned it into purest poetry. Only the noblest souls have such an alchemy as this at command, thought the watcher on the other side of the room with a passionate reverence.

'I was n't thinkin' of narrowin' the Lord down to ministers,' said Mrs. Fleming, with a certain loftiness. 'We all know He can do without us puir worms.'

Then, seeing that no one replied, the good woman got up to go. Much of her apparel had slipped away from her in the fervours of revivalist anecdote, and while she hunted for gloves and reticule — officiously

WESTMORELAND

helped by the younger girls — Robert crossed over to Catherine.

‘You lifted us on to your own high places!’ he said, bending down to her; ‘I shall carry your story with me through the fells.’

She looked up, and as she met his warm moved look a little glow and tremor crept into the face, destroying its exalted expression. He broke the spell; she sank from the poet into the embarrassed woman.

‘You must see my old man,’ she said, with an effort; ‘he is worth a library of sermons. I must introduce him to you.’

He could think of nothing else to say just then, but could only stand impatiently wishing for Mrs. Fleming’s disappearance, that he might somehow appropriate her eldest niece. But alas! when she went, Catherine went out with her, and reappeared no more, though he waited some time.

He walked home in a whirl of feeling; on the way he stopped, and leaning over a gate which led into one of the river-fields gave himself up to the mounting tumult within. Gradually, from the half-articulate chaos of hope and memory, there emerged the deliberate voice of his inmost manhood.

‘In her and her only is my heart’s desire! She and she only if she will, and God will, shall be my wife!’

He lifted his head and looked out on the dewy field, the evening beauty of the hills, with a sense of immeasurable change —

‘Tears
Were in his eyes, and in his ears
The murmur of a thousand years.’

ROBERT ELSMERE

He felt himself knit to his kind, to his race, as he had never felt before. It was as though, after a long apprenticeship, he had sprung suddenly into maturity — entered at last into the full human heritage. But the very intensity and solemnity of his own feeling gave him a rare clear-sightedness. He realised that he had no certainty of success, scarcely even an entirely reasonable hope. But what of that? Were they not together, alone, practically, in these blessed solitudes? Would they not meet to-morrow, and next day, and the day after? Were not time and opportunity all his own? How kind her looks are even now! Courage! And through that maidenly kindness his own passion shall send the last, transmuting glow.

CHAPTER VII

THE following morning about noon, Rose, who had been coaxed and persuaded by Catherine, much against her will, into taking a singing-class at the school, closed the school-door behind her with a sigh of relief, and tripped up the road to Burwood.

‘How abominably they sang this morning!’ she said to herself with curving lip. ‘Talk of the natural North-country gift for music! What ridiculous fictions people set up! Dear me, what clouds! Perhaps we shan’t get our walk to Shanmoor after all, and if we don’t, and if — if’ — her cheek flushed with a sudden excitement — ‘if Mr. Elsmere does n’t propose, Mrs. Thornburgh will be unmanageable. It is all Agnes and I can do to keep her in bounds as it is, and if *something* does n’t come off to-day, she’ll be for reversing the usual proceeding, and asking *Catherine* her intentions, which would ruin everything.’

Then raising her head she swept her eyes round the sky. The wind was freshening, the clouds were coming up fast from the westward; over the summit of High Fell and the crags on either side, a grey straight-edged curtain was already lowering.

‘It will hold up yet a while,’ she thought, ‘and if it rains later we can get a carriage at Shanmoor and come back by the road.’

And she walked on homewards meditating, her thin fingers clasped before her, the wind blowing her

skirts, the blue ribbons on her hat, the little gold curls on her temples, in a pretty many-coloured turmoil about her. When she got to Burwood she shut herself into the room which was peculiarly hers, the room which had been a stable. Now it was full of artistic odds and ends — her fiddle, of course, and piles of music, her violin-stand, a few deal tables and cane chairs beautified by a number of *chiffons*, bits of Liberty stuffs with the edges still ragged, or cheap morsels of Syrian embroidery. On the tables stood photographs of musicians and friends — the spoils of her visits to Manchester, and of two visits to London which gleamed like golden points in the girl's memory. The plastered walls were covered with an odd medley. Here was a round mirror, of which Rose was enormously proud. She had extracted it from a farmhouse of the neighbourhood, and paid for it with her own money. There a group of unfinished headlong sketches of the most fiercely impressionist description — the work and the gift of a knot of Manchester artists, who had fêted and flattered the beautiful little Westmoreland girl, when she was staying among them, to her heart's content. Manchester, almost alone among our great towns of the present day, has not only a musical, but a pictorial life of its own; its young artists dub themselves 'a school,' study in Paris, and when they come home scout the Academy and its methods, and pine to set up a rival art-centre, skilled in all the methods of the Salon, in the murky North. Rose's uncle, originally a clerk in a warehouse, and a rough diamond enough, had more or less moved with the times, like his brother Richard; at any rate he had

WESTMORELAND

grown rich, had married a decent wife, and was glad enough to befriend his dead brother's children, who wanted nothing of him, and did their uncle a credit of which he was sensible, by their good manners and good looks. Music was the only point at which he touched the culture of the times, like so many business men; but it pleased him also to pose as a patron of local art; so that when Rose went to stay with her childless uncle and aunt, she found long-haired artists and fiery musicians about the place, who had excited and encouraged her musical gift, who sketched her while she played, and talked to the pretty, clever, unformed creature of London and Paris and Italy, and set her pining for that golden *vie de Bohème* which she alone apparently of all artists was destined never to know.

For she was an artist — she would be an artist — let Catherine say what she would! She came back from Manchester restless for she knew not what, thirsty for the joys and emotions of art, determined to be free, reckless, passionate; with Wagner and Brahms in her young blood; and found Burwood waiting for her — Burwood, the lonely house in the lonely valley, of which Catherine was the presiding genius. *Catherine!* For Rose, what a multitude of associations clustered round the name! To her it meant everything at this moment against which her soul rebelled — the most scrupulous order, the most rigid self-repression, the most determined sacrificing of 'this warm kind world,' with all its indefensible delights, to a cold other-world, with its torturing inadmissible claims. Even in the midst of her stolen joys at Manchester or London, this mere name, the mere mental image of Catherine mov-

ROBERT ELSMERE

ing through life, wrapped in a religious peace and certainty as austere as they were beautiful, and asking of all about her the same absolute surrender to an awful Master she gave so easily herself, was enough to chill the wayward Rose, and fill her with a kind of restless despair. And at home, as the vicar said, the two sisters were always on the verge of conflict. Rose had enough of her father in her to suffer in resisting, but resist she must by the law of her nature.

Now, as she threw off her walking-things, she fell first upon her violin, and rushed through a Brahms's 'Liebeslied,' her eyes dancing, her whole light form thrilling with the joy of it; and then with a sudden revulsion she stopped playing, and threw herself down listlessly by the open window. Close by against the wall was a little looking-glass, by which she often arranged her ruffled locks; she glanced at it now, it showed her a brilliant face enough, but drooping lips, and eyes darkened with the extravagant melancholy of eighteen.

'It is come to a pretty pass,' she said to herself, 'that I should be able to think of nothing but schemes for getting Catherine married and out of my way! Considering what she is and what I am, and how she has slaved for us all her life, I seem to have descended pretty low. Heigh ho!'

And with a portentous sigh she dropped her chin on her hand. She was half-acting, acting to herself. Life was not really quite unbearable, and she knew it. But it relieved her to overdo it.

'I wonder how much chance there is,' she mused presently. 'Mr. Elsmere will soon be ridiculous. Why,

WESTMORELAND

I saw him gather up those violets she threw away yesterday on Moor Crag. And as for her, I don't believe she has realised the situation a bit. At least, if she has, she is as unlike other mortals in this as in everything else. But when she does —'

She frowned and meditated, but got no light on the problem. Chattie jumped up on the window-sill, with her usual stealthy *aplomb*, and rubbed herself against the girl's face.

'Oh, Chattie!' cried Rose, throwing her arms round the cat, 'if Catherine 'll *only* marry Mr. Elsmere, my dear, and be happy ever afterwards, and set me free to live my own life a bit, I'll be so good, you won't know me, Chattie. And you shall have a new collar, my beauty, and cream till you die of it!'

And springing up she dragged in the cat, and snatching a scarlet anemone from a bunch on the table, stood opposite Chattie, who stood slowly waving her magnificent tail from side to side, and glaring as though it were not at all to her taste to be hustled and bustled in this way.

'Now, Chattie, listen! Will she?'

A leaf of the flower dropped on Chattie's nose.

'Won't she? Will she? Won't she? Will — Tiresome flower, why did Nature give it such a beggarly few petals? If I'd had a daisy it would have all come right. Come, Chattie, waltz; and let's forget this wicked world!'

And, snatching up her violin, the girl broke into a Strauss waltz, dancing to it the while, her cotton skirts flying, her pretty feet twinkling, till her eyes glowed, and her cheeks blazed with a double intoxication —

the intoxication of movement, and the intoxication of sound — the cat meanwhile following her with little mincing perplexed steps, as though not knowing what to make of her.

‘Rose, you madcap!’ cried Agnes, opening the door.

‘Not at all, my dear,’ said Rose calmly, stopping to take breath. ‘Excellent practice and uncommonly difficult. Try if you can do it, and see!’

The weather held up in a grey grudging sort of way, and Mrs. Thornburgh especially was all for braving the clouds and going on with the expedition. It was galling to her that she herself would have to be driven to Shanmoor behind the fat vicarage pony, while the others would be climbing the fells, and all sorts of exciting things might be happening. Still it was infinitely better to be half in it than not in it at all, and she started by the side of the vicarage ‘man’ in a most delicious flutter. The skies might fall any day now. Elsmere had not confided in her, though she was unable to count the openings she had given him thereto. For one of the frankest of men he had kept his secret, so far as words went, with a remarkable tenacity. Probably the neighbourhood of Mrs. Thornburgh was enough to make the veriest chatterbox secretive. But notwithstanding, no one possessing the clue could live in the same house with him these June days without seeing that the whole man was absorbed, transformed, and that the crisis might be reached at any moment. Even the vicar was eager and watchful, and playing up to his wife in fine style, and if the situation had so worked on the vicar, Mrs. Thornburgh’s state is easier imagined than described.

WESTMORELAND

The walk to Shanmoor need not be chronicled. The party kept together. Robert fancied sometimes that there was a certain note of purpose in the way in which Catherine clung to the vicar. If so it did not disquiet him. Never had she been kinder, more gentle. Nay, as the walk went on, a lovely gaiety broke through her tranquil manner, as though she, like the others, had caught exhilaration from the sharpened breeze and the towering mountains, restored to all their grandeur by the storm-clouds.

And yet she had started in some little inward trouble. She had promised to join this walk to Shanmoor, she had promised to go with the others on a picnic the following day, but her conscience was pricking her. Twice this last fortnight had she been forced to give up a night-school she held in a little lonely hamlet among the fells, because even *she* had been too tired to walk there and back after a day of physical exertion. Were not the world and the flesh encroaching? She had been conscious of a strange inner restlessness as they all stood waiting in the road for the vicar and Elsmere. Agnes had thought her looking depressed and pale, and even dreamt for a moment of suggesting to her to stay at home. And then ten minutes after they had started it had all gone, her depression, blown away by the winds, — or charmed away by a happy voice, a manly presence, a keen responsive eye?

Elsmere, indeed, was gaiety itself. He kept up an incessant war with Rose; he had a number of little jokes going at the vicar's expense, which kept that good man in a half-protesting chuckle most of the

way; he cleared every gate that presented itself in first-rate Oxford form, and climbed every point of rock with a cat-like agility that set the girls scoffing at the pretence of invalidism under which he had foisted himself on Whindale.

‘How fine all this black purple is!’ he cried, as they topped the ridge, and the Shanmoor valley lay before them, bounded on the other side by line after line of mountain, Wetherlam and the Pikes and Fairfield in the far distance, piled sombrely under a sombre sky. ‘I had grown quite tired of the sun. He had done his best to make you commonplace.’

‘Tired of the sun in Westmoreland?’ said Catherine, with a little mocking wonder. ‘How wanton, how prodigal!’

‘Does it deserve a Nemesis?’ he said, laughing. ‘Drowning from now till I depart? No matter. I can bear a second deluge with an even mind. On this enchanted soil all things are welcome!’

She looked up, smiling, at his vehemence, taking it all as a tribute to the country, or to his own recovered health. He stood leaning on his stick, gazing, however, not at the view, but at her. The others stood a little way off laughing and chattering. As their eyes met, a strange new pulse leapt up in Catherine.

‘The wind is very boisterous here,’ she said, with a shiver. ‘I think we ought to be going on.’

And she hurried up to the others, nor did she leave their shelter till they were in sight of the little Shanmoor inn, where they were to have tea. The pony-carriage was already standing in front of the inn, and Mrs. Thornburgh’s grey curls shaking at the window.

WESTMORELAND

‘William!’ she shouted, ‘bring them in. Tea is just ready, and Mr. Ruskin was here last week, and there are ever so many new names in the visitors’ book!’

While the girls went in, Elsmere stood looking a moment at the inn, the bridge, and the village. It was a characteristic Westmoreland scene. The low whitewashed inn, with its newly painted signboard, was to his right, the pony at the door lazily flicking off the flies and dropping its greedy nose in search of the grains of corn among the cobbles; to his left a grey stone bridge over a broad light-filled river; beyond, a little huddled village backed by and apparently built out of the great slate quarry which represented the only industry of the neighbourhood, and a tiny towered church — the scene on the Sabbath of Mr. Mayhew’s ministrations. Beyond the village, shoulders of purple fell, and behind the inn masses of broken crag rising at the very head of the valley into a fine pike, along whose jagged edges the rain-clouds were trailing. There was a little lurid storm-light on the river, but, in general, the colour was all dark and rich, the white inn gleaming on a green-and-purple background. He took it all into his heart, covetously, greedily, trying to fix it there for ever.

Presently he was called in by the vicar, and found a tempting tea spread in a light upper room, where Agnes and Rose were already making fun of the chromo-lithographs and rummaging the visitors’ book. The scrambling, chattering meal passed like a flash. At the beginning of it Mrs. Thornburgh’s small grey eyes had travelled restlessly from face to face, as though to say, ‘What — *no* news yet? Nothing

ROBERT ELSMERE

happened?’ As for Elsmere, though it seemed to him at the time one of the brightest moments of existence, he remembered little afterwards but the scene; the peculiar clean mustiness of the room only just opened for the summer season, a print of the Princess of Wales on the wall opposite him, a stuffed fox over the mantelpiece, Rose’s golden head and heavy amber necklace, and the figure at the vicar’s right, in a gown of a little dark blue check, the broad hat shading the white brow and luminous eyes.

When tea was over they lounged out on the bridge. There was to be no long lingering, however. The clouds were deepening, the rain could not be far off. But if they started soon they could probably reach home before it came down. Elsmere and Rose hung over the grey stone parapet, mottled with the green-and-gold of innumerable mosses, and looked down through a fringe of English maidenhair growing along the coping, into the clear eddies of the stream. Suddenly he raised himself on one elbow, and, shading his eyes, looked to where the vicar and Catherine were standing in front of the inn, touched for an instant by a beam of fitful light slipping between two great rain-clouds.

‘How well that hat and dress become your sister!’ he said, the words breaking, as it were, from his lips.

‘Do you think Catherine pretty?’ said Rose, with an excellent pretence of innocence, detaching a little pebble and flinging it harmlessly at a water-wagtail balancing on a stone below.

He flushed. ‘Pretty! You might as well apply the

WESTMORELAND

word to your mountains, to the exquisite river, to that great purple peak!’

‘Yes,’ thought Rose, ‘she is not unlike that high cold peak!’ But her girlish sympathy conquered her; it was very exciting, and she liked Elsmere. She turned back to him, her face overspread with a quite irrepressible smile. He reddened still more, then they stared into each other’s eyes, and without a word more understood each other perfectly.

Rose held out her hand to him with a little brusque *bon camarade* gesture. He pressed it warmly in his.

‘That was nice of you!’ he cried. ‘Very nice of you! Friends then?’

She nodded, and drew her hand away just as Agnes and the vicar disturbed them.

Meanwhile Catherine was standing by the side of the pony-carriage, watching Mrs. Thornburgh’s preparations.

‘You’re sure you don’t mind driving home alone?’ she said in a troubled voice. ‘May n’t I go with you?’

‘My dear, certainly not! As if I was n’t accustomed to going about alone at my time of life! No, no, my dear, you go and have your walk; you’ll get home before the rain. Ready, James.’

The old vicarage factotum could not imagine what made his charge so anxious to be off. She actually took the whip out of his hand and gave a flick to the pony, who swerved and started off in a way which would have made his mistress clamorously nervous under any other circumstances. Catherine stood looking after her.

‘Now, then, right about face and quick march!’ ex-

ROBERT ELSMERE

claimed the vicar. 'We've got to race that cloud over the Pike. It'll be up with us in no time.'

Off they started, and were soon climbing the slippery green slopes, or crushing through the fern of the fell they had descended earlier in the afternoon. Catherine for some little way walked last of the party, the vicar in front of her. Then Elsmere picked a stonecrop, quarrelled over its precise name with Rose, and waited for Catherine, who had a very close and familiar knowledge of the botany of the district.

'You have crushed me,' he said, laughing, as he put the flower carefully into his pocket-book; 'but it is worth while to be crushed by any one who can give so much ground for their knowledge. How you do know your mountains—from their peasants to their plants!'

'I have had more than ten able-bodied years living and scrambling among them,' she said, smiling.

'Do you keep up all your visits and teaching in the winter?'

'Oh, not so much, of course! But people must be helped and taught in the winter. And our winter is often not as hard as yours down South.'

'Do you go on with that night-school in Poll Ghyll, for instance?' he said, with another note in his voice.

Catherine looked at him and coloured. 'Rose has been telling tales,' she said. 'I wish she would leave my proceedings alone. Poll Ghyll is the family bone of contention at present. Yes, I go on with it. I always take a lantern when the night is dark, and I know every inch of the ground, and Bob is always with me; are n't you, Bob?'

WESTMORELAND

And she stooped down to pat the collie beside her. Bob looked up at her, blinking with a proudly confidential air as though to remind her that there were a good many such secrets between them.

‘I like to fancy you with your lantern in the dark,’ he cried, the hidden emotion piercing through; ‘the night wind blowing about you, the black mountains to right and left of you, some little stream, perhaps, running beside you for company, your dog guarding you, and all good angels going with you.’

She flushed still more deeply; the impetuous words affected her strangely.

‘Don’t fancy it at all,’ she said, laughing. ‘It is a very small and very natural incident of one’s life here. Look back, Mr. Elsmere; the rain has beaten us!’

He looked back and saw the great Pike over Shanmoor village blotted out in a moving deluge of rain. The quarry opposite on the mountain-side gleamed green and vivid against the ink-black fell; some clothes hanging out in the field below the church flapped wildly hither and thither in the sudden gale, the only spot of white in the prevailing blackness; children with their petticoats over their heads ran homewards along the road the walking party had just quitted; the stream beneath, spreading broadly through the fields, shivered and wrinkled under the blast. Up it came, and the rain mists with it. In another minute the storm was beating in their faces.

‘Caught!’ cried Elsmere, in a voice almost of jubilation. ‘Let me help you into your cloak, Miss Leyburn.’

He flung it round her, and struggled into his own

ROBERT ELSMERE

mackintosh. The vicar in front of them turned and waved his hand to them in laughing despair, then hurried after the others, evidently with the view of performing for them the same office Elsmere had just performed for Catherine.

Robert and his companion struggled on for a while in a breathless silence against the deluge, which seemed to beat on them from all sides. He walked behind her, sheltering her by his tall form and his big umbrella as much as he could. His pulses were all aglow with the joy of the storm. It seemed to him that he rejoiced with the thirsty grass over which the rain streams were running, that his heart filled with the shrunken becks as the flood leapt along them. Let the elements thunder and rave as they pleased. Could he not at a word bring the light of that face, those eyes, upon him? Was she not his for a moment in the rain and the solitude, as she had never been in the commonplace sunshine of their valley life?

Suddenly he heard an exclamation, and saw her run on in front of him. What was the matter? Then he noticed for the first time that Rose, far ahead, was still walking in her cotton dress. The little scatterbrain had, of course, forgotten her cloak. But, monstrous! There was Catherine stripping off her own, Rose refusing it. In vain. The sister's determined arms put it round her. Rose is enwrapped, buttoned up before she knows where she is, and Catherine falls back, pursued by some shaft from Rose, more sarcastic than grateful, to judge by the tone of it.

‘Miss Leyburn, what have you been doing?’

‘Rose had forgotten her cloak,’ she said briefly. ‘She

WESTMORELAND

has a very thin dress on, and she is the only one of us that takes cold easily.'

'You must take my mackintosh,' he said at once.

She laughed in his face.

'As if I should do anything of the sort!'

'You must,' he said, quietly stripping it off. 'Do you think that you are always to be allowed to go through the world taking thought of other people and allowing no one to take thought for you?'

He held it out to her.

'No, no! This is absurd, Mr. Elsmere. You are not strong yet. And I have often told you that nothing hurts me.'

He hung it deliberately over his arm. 'Very well, then, there it stays!'

And they hurried on again, she biting her lip and on the point of laughter.

'Mr. Elsmere, be sensible!' she said presently, her look changing to one of real distress. 'I should never forgive myself if you got a chill after your illness!'

'You will not be called upon,' he said in the most matter-of-fact tone. 'Men's coats are made to keep out weather,' and he pointed to his own, closely buttoned up. 'Your dress — I can't help being disrespectful under the circumstances — will be wet through in ten minutes.'

Another silence. Then he overtook her.

'Please, Miss Leyburn,' he said, stopping her.

There was an instant's mute contest between them. The rain splashed on the umbrellas. She could not help it, she broke down into the merriest, most musical laugh of a child that can hardly stop itself, and he joined.

ROBERT ELSMERE

‘Mr. Elsmere, you are ridiculous!’

But she submitted. He put the mackintosh round her, thinking, bold man, as she turned her rosy rain-dewed face to him, of Wordsworth’s ‘Louisa,’ and the poet’s cry of longing.

And yet he was not so bold either. Even at this moment of exhilaration he was conscious of a bar that checked and arrested. Something — what was it? — drew invisible lines of defence about her. A sort of divine fear of her mingled with his rising passion. Let him not risk too much too soon.

They walked on briskly, and were soon on the Whindale side of the pass. To the left of them the great hollow of High Fell unfolded, storm-beaten and dark, the river issuing from the heart of it like an angry voice.

‘What a change!’ he said, coming up with her as the path widened. ‘How impossible that it should have been only yesterday afternoon I was lounging up here in the heat, by the pool where the stream rises, watching the white butterflies on the turf, and reading “Laodamia”!’

“Laodamia”!’ she said, half-sighing as she caught the name. ‘Is it one of those you like best?’

‘Yes,’ he said, bending forward that he might see her in spite of the umbrella. ‘How superb it is — the roll, the majesty of it; the severe chastened beauty of the main feeling, the individual lines!’

And he quoted line after line, lingering over the cadences.

‘It was my father’s favourite of all,’ she said, in the low vibrating voice of memory. ‘He said the last verse to me the day before he died.’

WESTMORELAND

Robert recalled it —

‘Yet tears to human suffering are due,
And mortal hopes defeated and o’erthrown
Are mourned by man, and not by man alone
As fondly we believe.’

Poor Richard Leyburn! Yet where had the defeat lain?

‘Was he happy in his school life?’ he asked gently.
‘Was teaching what he liked?’

‘Oh yes — only —’ Catherine paused and then added hurriedly, as though drawn on in spite of herself by the grave sympathy of his look, ‘I never knew anybody so good who thought himself of so little account. He always believed that he had missed everything, wasted everything, and that anybody else would have made infinitely more out of his life. He was always blaming, scourging himself. And all the time he was the noblest, purest, most devoted —’

She stopped. Her voice had passed beyond her control. Elsmere was startled by the feeling she showed. Evidently he had touched one of the few sore places in this pure heart. It was as though her memory of her father had in it elements of almost intolerable pathos, as though the child’s brooding love and loyalty were in perpetual protest, even now after this lapse of years, against the verdict which an over-scrupulous, despondent soul had pronounced upon itself. Did she feel that he had gone uncomforted out of life — even by her — even by religion? — was that the sting?

‘Oh, I can understand!’ he said reverently — ‘I can understand. I have come across it once or twice, that fierce self-judgement of the good. It is the most

ROBERT ELSMERE

stirring and humbling thing in life.' Then his voice dropped. 'And after the last conflict — the last "quailing breath" — the last onslaughts of doubt or fear — think of the Vision waiting — the Eternal Comfort —

"Oh, my only Light!
It cannot be
That I am he
On whom Thy tempests fell all night!"

The words fell from the softened voice like noble music.

There was a pause. Then Catherine raised her eyes to his. They swam in tears, and yet the unspoken thanks in them were radiance itself. It seemed to him as though she came closer to him like a child to an elder who has soothed and satisfied an inward smart.

They walked on in silence. They were just nearing the swollen river which roared below them. On the opposite bank two umbrellas were vanishing through the field gate into the road, but the vicar had turned and was waiting for them. They could see his be-cloaked figure leaning on his stick through the light wreaths of mist that floated above the tumbling stream. The abnormally heavy rain had ceased, but the clouds seemed to be dragging along the very floor of the valley.

The stepping-stones came into sight. He leapt on the first and held out his hand to her. When they started she would have refused his help with scorn. Now, after a moment's hesitation she yielded, and he felt her dear weight on him as he guided her carefully from stone to stone. In reality it is both difficult

The Stepping-Stones



WESTMORELAND

and risky to be helped over stepping-stones. You had much better manage for yourself; and halfway through Catherine had a mind to tell him so. But the words died on her lips which smiled instead. He could have wished that passage from stone to stone could have lasted for ever. She was wrapped up grotesquely in his mackintosh; her hat was all bedraggled; her gloves dripped in his; and in spite of all he could have vowed that anything so lovely as that delicately cut, gravely smiling face, swaying above the rushing brown water, was never seen in Westmoreland wilds before.

‘It is clearing,’ he cried, with ready optimism, as they reached the bank. ‘We shall get our picnic tomorrow after all — we *must* get it! Promise me it shall be fine — and you will be there!’

The vicar was only fifty yards away waiting for them against the field gate. But Robert held her eagerly, imperiously — and it seemed to her her head was still dizzy with the water.

‘Promise!’ he repeated, his voice dropping.

She could not stop to think of the absurdity of promising for Westmoreland weather. She could only say faintly ‘Yes!’ and so release her hand.

‘You *are* pretty wet!’ said the vicar, looking from one to the other with a curiosity which Robert’s quick sense divined at once was directed to something else than the mere condition of their garments. But Catherine noticed nothing; she walked on wrestling blindly with she knew not what till they reached the vicarage gate. There stood Mrs. Thornburgh, the light drizzle into which the rain had declined beating unheeded on her curls and ample shoulders. She stared at Robert’s

drenched condition, but he gave her no time to make remarks.

‘Don’t take it off,’ he said, with a laughing wave of the hand to Catherine; ‘I will come for it to-morrow morning.’

And he ran up the drive, conscious at last that it might be prudent to get himself into something less sponge-like than his present attire as quickly as possible.

The vicar followed him.

‘Don’t keep Catherine, my dear. There’s nothing to tell. Nobody’s the worse.’

Mrs. Thornburgh took no heed. Opening the iron gate she went through it on to the deserted rain-beaten road, laid both her hands on Catherine’s shoulders, and looked her straight in the eyes. The vicar’s anxious hint was useless. She could contain herself no longer. She had watched them from the vicarage come down the fell together, had seen them cross the stepping-stones, lingeringly, hand in hand.

‘My dear Catherine!’ she cried, effusively kissing Catherine’s glowing cheek under the shelter of the laurustinus that made a bower of the gate. ‘My *dear* Catherine!’

Catherine gazed at her in astonishment. Mrs. Thornburgh’s eyes were all alive, and swarming with questions. If it had been Rose she would have let them out in one fell flight. But Catherine’s personality kept her in awe. And after a second, as the two stood together, a deep flush rose on Catherine’s face, and an expression of half-frightened apology dawned in Mrs. Thornburgh’s.

WESTMORELAND

Catherine drew herself away. 'Will you please give Mr. Elsmere his mackintosh?' she said, taking it off; 'I shan't want it this little way.'

And putting it on Mrs. Thornburgh's arm she turned away, walking quickly round the bend of the road.

Mrs. Thornburgh watched her open-mouthed, and moved slowly back to the house in a state of complete collapse.

'I always knew' — she said with a groan — 'I always knew it would never go right if it was Catherine! *Why* was it Catherine?'

And she went in, still hurling at Providence the same vindictive query.

Meanwhile Catherine, hurrying home, the receding flush leaving a sudden pallor behind it, was twisting her hands before her in a kind of agony.

'What have I been doing?' she said to herself. 'What have I been doing?'

At the gate of Burwood something made her look up. She saw the girls in their own room — Agnes was standing behind, Rose had evidently rushed forward to see Catherine come in, and now retreated as suddenly when she saw her sister look up.

Catherine understood it all in an instant. 'They, too, are on the watch,' she thought to herself bitterly. The strong reticent nature was outraged by the perception that she had been for days the unconscious actor in a drama of which her sisters and Mrs. Thornburgh had been the silent and intelligent spectators.

She came down presently from her room very white and quiet, admitted that she was tired, and said nothing to anybody. Agnes and Rose noticed the change

ROBERT ELSMERE

at once, whispered to each other when they found an opportunity, and foreboded ill.

After their tea-supper, Catherine, unperceived, slipped out of the little lane gate, and climbed the stony path above the house leading on to the fell. The rain had ceased, but the clouds hung low and threatening, and the close air was saturated with moisture. As she gained the bare fell, sounds of water met her on all sides. The river cried hoarsely to her from below, the beck in the little ghylls were full and thunderous; and beside her over the smooth grass slid many a newborn rivulet, the child of the storm, and destined to vanish with the night. Catherine's soul went out to welcome the grey damp of the hills. She knew them best in this mood. They were thus most her own.

She climbed on till at last she reached the crest of the ridge. Behind her lay the valley, and on its farther side the fells she had crossed in the afternoon. Before her spread a long green vale, compared to which Whindale with its white road, its church, and parsonage, and scattered houses, was the great world itself. Marrisdale had no road and not a single house. As Catherine descended into it she saw not a sign of human life. There were sheep grazing in the silence of the long June twilight; the blackish walls ran down and up again, dividing the green hollow with melancholy uniformity. Here and there was a sheepfold, suggesting the bleakness of winter nights; and here and there a rough stone barn for storing fodder. And beyond the vale, eastwards and northwards, Catherine looked out upon a wild sea of moors wrapped in mists, sullen and storm-beaten, while to the left the clouds hung

WESTMORELAND

deepest and inkiest over the high points of the Ullswater mountains.

When she was once below the pass, man and his world were shut out. The girl figure in the blue cloak and hood was absolutely alone. She descended till she reached a point where a little stream had been turned into a stone trough for cattle. Above it stood a gnarled and solitary thorn. Catherine sank down on a rock at the foot of the tree. It was a seat she knew well; she had lingered there with her father; she had thought and prayed there as girl and woman; she had wrestled there often with despondency or grief, or some of those subtle spiritual temptations which were all her pure youth had known, till the inner light had dawned again, and the humble enraptured soul could almost have traced amid the shadows of that dappled moorland world, between her and the clouds, the white stoles and 'sleeping wings' of ministering spirits.

But no wrestle had ever been so hard as this. And with what fierce suddenness had it come upon her! She looked back over the day with bewilderment. She could see dimly that the Catherine who had started on that Shanmoor walk had been full of vague misgivings other than those concerned with a few neglected duties. There had been an undefined sense of unrest, of difference, of broken equilibrium. She had shown it in the way in which at first she had tried to keep herself and Robert Elsmere apart.

And then; beyond the departure from Shanmoor she seemed to lose the thread of her own history. Memory was drowned in a feeling to which the resisting soul as yet would give no name. She laid her head on

ROBERT ELSMERE

her knees trembling. She heard again the sweet imperious tones with which he broke down her opposition about the cloak ; she felt again the grasp of his steady-hand on hers.

But it was only for a very few minutes that she drifted thus. She raised her head again, scourging herself in shame and self-reproach, recapturing the empire of the soul with a strong effort. She set herself to a stern analysis of the whole situation. Clearly Mrs. Thornburgh and her sisters had been aware for some indefinite time that Mr. Elsmere had been showing a peculiar interest in her. *Their* eyes had been open. She realised now with hot cheeks how many meetings and *tête-à-têtes* had been managed for her and Elsmere, and how complacently she had fallen into Mrs. Thornburgh's snares.

'Have I encouraged him?' she asked herself sternly.

'Yes,' cried the smarting conscience.

'Can I marry him?'

'No,' said conscience again ; 'not without deserting your post, not without betraying your trust.'

What post? What trust? Ah, conscience was ready enough with the answer. Was it not just ten years since, as a girl of sixteen, prematurely old and thoughtful, she had sat beside her father's deathbed, while her delicate hysterical mother, in a state of utter collapse, was kept away from him by the doctors? She could see the drawn face, the restless melancholy eyes. 'Catherine, my darling, you are the strong one. They will look to you. Support them.' And she could see in imagination her own young face pressed against the pillows. 'Yes, father, always — always!' — 'Cather-

ine, life is harder, the narrow way narrower than ever. I die' — and memory caught still the piteous, long-drawn breath by which the voice was broken — 'in much — much perplexity about many things. You have a clear soul, an iron will. Strengthen the others. Bring them safe to the day of account.' — 'Yes, father, with God's help. Oh, with God's help!'

That long-past dialogue is clear and sharp to her now, as though it were spoken afresh in her ears. And how has she kept her pledge? She looks back humbly on her life of incessant devotion, on the tie of long dependence which has bound to her her weak and widowed mother, on her relations to her sisters, the efforts she has made to train them in the spirit of her father's life and beliefs.

Have those efforts reached their term? Can it be said in any sense that her work is done, her promise kept?

Oh, no — no! she cries to herself with vehemence. Her mother depends on her every day and hour for protection, comfort, enjoyment. The girls are at the opening of life, — Agnes twenty, Rose eighteen, with all experience to come. And Rose — Ah! at the thought of Rose, Catherine's heart sinks deeper and deeper — she feels a culprit before her father's memory. What is it has gone so desperately wrong with her training of the child? Surely she has given love enough, anxious thought enough, and here is Rose only fighting to be free from the yoke of her father's wishes, from the galling pressure of the family tradition!

No. Her task has just now reached its most difficult, its most critical, moment. How can she leave it? Impossible.

ROBERT ELSMERE

What claim can she put against these supreme claims — of her promise, her mother's and sisters' need?

His claim? Oh, no — no! She admits with soreness and humiliation unspeakable that she has done him wrong. If he loves her she has opened the way thereto; she confesses in her scrupulous honesty that when the inevitable withdrawal comes she will have given him cause to think of her hardly, slightly. She flinches painfully under the thought. But it does not alter the matter. This girl, brought up in the austere school of Christian self-government, knows nothing of the divine rights of passion. Half modern literature is based upon them. Catherine Leyburn knew of no supreme right but the right of God to the obedience of man.

Oh, and besides — besides — it is impossible that he should care so very much. The time is so short — there is so little in her, comparatively, to attract a man of such resource, such attainments, such access to the best things of life.

She cannot — in a kind of terror — she *will* not, believe in her own love-worthiness, in her own power to deal a lasting wound.

Then her *own* claim? Has she any claim, has the poor bounding heart that she cannot silence, do what she will, through all this strenuous debate, no claim to satisfaction, to joy?

She locks her hands round her knees, conscious, poor soul, that the worst struggle is *here*, the quickest agony *here*. But she does not waver for an instant. And her weapons are all ready. The inmost soul of her

WESTMORELAND

is a fortress well stored, whence at any moment the mere personal craving of the natural man can be met, repulsed, slain.

'Man approacheth so much the nearer unto God the farther he departeth from all earthly comfort.'

'If thou couldst perfectly annihilate thyself and empty thyself of all created love, then should I be constrained to flow into thee with greater abundance of grace.'

'When thou lookest unto the creature the sight of the Creator is withdrawn from thee.'

'Learn in all things to overcome thyself for the love of thy Creator. . . .'

She presses the sentence she has so often meditated in her long solitary walks about the mountains into her heart. And one fragment of George Herbert especially rings in her ears, solemnly, funereally —

'Thy Saviour sentenced joy!'

Aye, sentenced it for ever — the personal craving, the selfish need, that must be filled at any cost. In the silence of the descending night Catherine quietly, with tears, carried out that sentence, and slew her young new-born joy at the feet of the Master.

She stayed where she was for a while after this crisis in a kind of bewilderment and stupor, but maintaining a perfect outward tranquillity. Then there was a curious little epilogue.

'It is all over,' she said to herself tenderly. *'But he has taught me so much — he has been so good to me — he is so good! Let me take to my heart some counsel — some word of his, and obey it sacredly — silently — for these days' sake.'*

ROBERT ELSMERE

Then she fell thinking again, and she remembered their talk about Rose. How often she had pondered it since! In this intense trance of feeling it breaks upon her finally that he is right. May it not be that he with his clearer thought, his wider knowledge of life, has laid his finger on the weak point in her guardianship of her sister? 'I have tried to stifle her passion,' she thought, 'to push it out of the way as a hindrance. Ought I not rather to have taught her to make of it a step in the ladder — to have moved her to bring her gifts to the altar? Oh, let me take his word for it — be ruled by him in this one thing, once!'

She bowed her face on her knees again. It seemed to her that she had thrown herself at Elsmere's feet, that her cheek was pressed against that young brown hand of his. How long the moment lasted she never knew. When at last she rose stiff and weary, darkness was overtaking even the lingering Northern twilight. The angry clouds had dropped lower on the moors; a few sheep beside the glimmering stone trough showed dimly white; the night wind was sighing through the untenanted valley and the scanty branches of the thorn. White mists lay along the hollow of the dale; they moved weirdly under the breeze. She could have fancied them a troop of wraiths to whom she had flung her warm crushed heart, and who were bearing it away to burial.

As she came slowly over the pass and down the Whindale side of the fell a clear purpose was in her mind. Agnes had talked to her only that morning of Rose and Rose's desire, and she had received the news with her habitual silence.

WESTMORELAND

The house was lit up when she returned. Her mother had gone upstairs. Catherine went to her, but even Mrs. Leyburn discovered that she looked worn out, and she was sent off to bed. She went along the passage quickly to Rose's room, listening a moment at the door. Yes, Rose was inside, crooning some German song, and apparently alone. She knocked and went in.

Rose was sitting on the edge of her bed, a white dressing-gown over her shoulders, her hair in a glorious confusion all about her. She was swaying backwards and forwards dreamily singing, and she started up when she saw Catherine.

'Röschen,' said the elder sister, going up to her with a tremor of heart, and putting her motherly arms round the curly golden hair and the half-covered shoulders, 'you never told me of that letter from Manchester, but Agnes did. Did you think, Röschen, I would never let you have your way? Oh, I am not so hard! I may have been wrong — I think I have been wrong; you shall do what you will, Röschen. If you want to go, I will ask mother.'

Rose, pushing herself away with one hand, stood staring. She was struck dumb by this sudden breaking down of Catherine's long resistance. And what a strange white Catherine! What did it mean? Catherine withdrew her arms with a little sigh and moved away.

'I just came to tell you that, Röschen,' she said, 'but I am very tired and must not stay.'

Catherine 'very tired'! Rose thought the skies must be falling.

ROBERT ELSMERE

‘Cathie!’ she cried, leaping forward just as her sister gained the door. ‘Oh, Cathie, you are an angel, and I am a nasty, odious little wretch. But oh, tell me, what is the matter?’

And she flung her strong young arms round Catherine with a passionate strength.

The elder sister struggled to release herself.

‘Let me go, Rose,’ she said in a low voice. ‘Oh, you *must* let me go!’

And wrenching herself free, she drew her hand over her eyes as though trying to drive away the mist from them.

‘Good-night! Sleep well.’

And she disappeared, shutting the door noiselessly after her. Rose stood staring a moment, and then, swept off her feet by a flood of many feelings — remorse, love, fear, sympathy — threw herself face downwards on her bed and burst into a passion of tears.

CHAPTER VIII

CATHERINE was much perplexed as to how she was to carry out her resolution; she pondered over it through much of the night. She was painfully anxious to make Elsmere understand without a scene, without a definite proposal and a definite rejection. It was no use letting things drift. Something brusque and marked there must be. She quietly made her dispositions.

It was long after the grey vaporous morning stole on the hills before she fell lightly, restlessly asleep. To her healthful youth a sleepless night was almost unknown. She wondered through the long hours of it, whether now, like other women, she had had her story, passed through her one supreme moment, and she thought of one or two worthy old maids she knew in the neighbourhood with a new and curious pity. Had any of them, too, gone down into Marrisdale and come up widowed indeed?

All through, no doubt, there was a certain melancholy pride in her own spiritual strength. 'It was not mine,' she would have said with perfect sincerity, 'but God's.' Still, whatever its source, it had been there at command, and the reflexion carried with it a sad sense of security. It was as though a soldier after his first skirmish should congratulate himself on being bullet-proof.

To be sure, there was an intense trouble and dis-

ROBERT ELSMERE

quiet in the thought that she and Mr. Elsmere must meet again, probably many times. The period of his original invitation had been warmly extended by the Thornburghs. She believed he meant to stay another week or ten days in the valley. But in the spiritual exaltation of the night she felt herself equal to any conflict, any endurance, and she fell asleep, the hands clasped on her breast expressing a kind of resolute patience, like those of some old sepulchral monument.

The following morning Elsmere examined the clouds and the barometer with abnormal interest. The day was sunless and lowering, but not raining, and he represented to Mrs. Thornburgh, with a hypocritical assumption of the practical man, that with rugs and mackintoshes it was possible to picnic on the dampest grass. But he could not make out the vicar's wife. She was all sighs and flightiness. She 'supposed they could go,' and 'did n't see what good it would do them'; she had twenty different views, and all of them more or less mixed up with pettishness, as to the best place for a picnic on a grey day; and at last she grew so difficult that Robert suspected something desperately wrong with the household, and withdrew lest male guests might be in the way. Then she pursued him into the study and thrust a *Spectator* into his hands, begging him to convey it to Burwood. She asked it lugubriously with many sighs, her cap much askew. Robert could have kissed her, curls and all, one moment for suggesting the errand, and the next could almost have signed her committal to the county lunatic asylum with a clear conscience. What an extraordinary person it was!

WESTMORELAND

Off he went, however, with his *Spectator* under his arm, whistling. Mrs. Thornburgh caught the sounds through an open window, and tore the flannel across she was preparing for a mothers' meeting with a noise like the rattle of musketry. Whistling! She would like to know what grounds he had for it, indeed! She always knew — she always said, and she would go on saying — that Catherine Leyburn would die an old maid.

Meanwhile Robert had strolled across to Burwood with the lightest heart. By way of keeping all his anticipations within the bounds of strict reason, he told himself that it was impossible he should see 'her' in the morning. She was always busy in the morning.

He approached the house as a Catholic might approach a shrine. That was her window, that upper casement with the little Banksia rose twining round it. One night, when he and the vicar had been out late on the hills, he had seen a light streaming from it across the valley, and had thought how the mistress of the maiden solitude within shone 'in a naughty world.'

In the drive he met Mrs. Leyburn, who was strolling about the garden. She at once informed him with much languid plaintiveness that Catherine had gone to Whinborough for the day, and would not be able to join the picnic.

Elsmere stood still.

'Gone!' he cried. 'But it was all arranged with her yesterday!'

Mrs. Leyburn shrugged her shoulders. She too was evidently much put out.

'So I told her. But you know, Mr. Elsmere' — and

ROBERT ELSMERE

the gentle widow dropped her voice as though communicating a secret — ‘when Catherine’s once made up her mind, you may as well try to dig away High Fell as move her. She asked me to tell Mrs. Thornburgh — will you, please? — that she found it was her day for the orphan asylum, and one or two other pieces of business, and she must go.’

‘*Mrs. Thornburgh!*’ And not a word for him — for *him* to whom she had given her promise? She had gone to Whinborough to avoid him, and she had gone in the brusque way, that it might be unmistakeable.

The young man stood with his hands thrust into the pockets of his long coat, hearing with half an ear the remarks that Mrs. Leyburn was making to him about the picnic. Was the wretched thing to come off after all?

He was too proud and sore to suggest an alternative. But Mrs. Thornburgh managed that for him. When he got back, he told the vicar in the hall of Miss Leyburn’s flight in the fewest possible words, and then his long legs vanished up the stairs in a twinkling, and the door of his room shut behind him. A few minutes afterwards Mrs. Thornburgh’s shrill voice was heard in the hall calling to the servant.

‘Sarah, let the hamper alone. Take out the chickens.’

And a minute after the vicar came up to his door.

‘Elsmere, Mrs. Thornburgh thinks the day is too uncertain; better put it off.’

To which Elsmere from inside replied with a vigorous assent. The vicar slowly descended to tackle his spouse, who seemed to have established herself for

WESTMORELAND

the morning in his sanctum, though the parish accounts were clamouring to be done, and this morning in the week belonged to them by immemorial usage.

But Mrs. Thornburgh was unmanageable. She sat opposite to him with one hand on each knee, solemnly demanding of him if *he* knew what was to be done with young women nowadays, because *she* did n't.

The tormented vicar declined to be drawn into so illimitable a subject, recommended patience, declared that it might be all a mistake, and tried hard to absorb himself in the consideration of 2s. 8d. *plus* 2s. 11d. *minus* 9d.

'And I suppose, William,' said his wife to him at last, with withering sarcasm, 'that you'd sit by and see Catherine break that young man's heart, and send him back to his mother no better than he came here, in spite of all the beef-tea and jelly Sarah and I have been putting into him, and never lift a finger. You'd see his life *blasted* and you'd do nothing — nothing, I suppose.'

And she fixed him with a fiercely interrogative eye.

'Of course,' cried the vicar, roused; 'I should think so. What good did an outsider ever get by meddling in a love-affair? Take care of yourself, Emma. If the girl does n't care for him, you can't make her.'

The vicar's wife rose, the upturned corners of her mouth saying unutterable things.

'Does n't care for him!' she echoed in a tone which implied that her husband's headpiece was past praying for.

'Yes, does n't care for him!' said the vicar, nettled. 'What else should make her give him a snub like this?'

ROBERT ELSMERE

Mrs. Thornburgh looked at him again with exasperation. Then a curious expression stole into her eyes.

‘Oh, the Lord only knows!’ she said, with a hasty freedom of speech which left the vicar feeling decidedly uncomfortable as she shut the door after her.

However, if the Higher Powers alone *knew*, Mrs. Thornburgh was convinced that she could make a very shrewd guess at the causes of Catherine’s behaviour. In her opinion it was all pure ‘cussedness.’ Catherine Leyburn had always conducted her life on principles entirely different from those of other people. Mrs. Thornburgh wholly denied, as she sat bridling by herself, that it was a Christian necessity to make yourself and other people uncomfortable. Yet this was what this perverse young woman was always doing. Here was a charming young man who had fallen in love with her at first sight, and had done his best to make the fact plain to her in the most chivalrous devoted ways. Catherine encourages him, walks with him, talks with him, is for a whole three weeks more gay and cheerful and more like other girls than she has ever been known to be, and then, at the end of it, just when everybody is breathlessly awaiting the natural *dénouement*, goes off to spend the day that should have been the day of her betrothal, in pottering about orphan asylums, leaving everybody, but especially the poor young man, to look ridiculous! No, Mrs. Thornburgh had no patience with her — none at all. It was all because she would not be happy like anybody else, but must needs set herself up to be peculiar. Why not live on a pillar, and go into hair-

WESTMORELAND

shirts at once? Then the rest of the world would know what to be at.

Meanwhile Rose was in no small excitement. While her mother and Elsmere had been talking in the garden she had been discreetly waiting in the back behind the angle of the house, and when she saw Elsmere walk off she followed him with eager sympathetic eyes.

‘Poor fellow!’ she said to herself, but this time with the little tone of patronage which a girl of eighteen, conscious of graces and good looks, never shrinks from assuming towards an elder male, especially a male in love with some one else. ‘I wonder whether he thinks he knows anything about Catherine.’

But her own feeling to-day was very soft and complex. Yesterday it had been all hot rebellion. To-day it was all remorse and wondering curiosity. What had brought Catherine into her room, with that white face, and that bewildering change of policy? What had made her do this brusque, discourteous thing to-day? Rose, having been delayed by the loss of one of her goloshes in a bog, had been once near her and Elsmere during that dripping descent from Shanmoor. They had been so clearly absorbed in one another that she had fled on guiltily to Agnes, golosh in hand, without waiting to put it on; confident, however, that neither Elsmere nor Catherine had been aware of her little adventure. And at the Shanmoor tea Catherine herself had discussed the picnic, offering, in fact, to guide the party to a particular ghyll in High Fell, better known to her than any one else.

‘Oh, of course it’s our salvation in this world and the next that’s in the way,’ thought Rose, sitting

ROBERT ELSMERE

crouched up in a grassy nook in the garden, her shoulders up to her ears, her chin in her hands. 'I wish to goodness Catherine would n't think so much about mine, at any rate. I hate,' added this incorrigible young person — 'I hate being the third part of a "moral obstacle" against my will. I declare I don't believe we should any of us go to perdition even if Catherine did marry. And what a wretch I am to think so after last night! Oh dear, I wish she'd let me do something for her; I wish she'd ask me to black her boots for her, or put in her tuckers, or tidy her drawers for her, or anything worse still, and I'd do it and welcome!'

It was getting uncomfortably serious all round, Rose admitted. But there was one element of comedy besides Mrs. Thornburgh, and that was Mrs. Leyburn's unconsciousness.

'Mamma is too good,' thought the girl, with a little ripple of laughter. 'She takes it as a matter of course that all the world should admire us, and she'd scorn to believe that anybody did it from interested motives.'

Which was perfectly true. Mrs. Leyburn was too devoted to her daughters to feel any fidgety interest in their marrying. Of course the most eligible persons would be only too thankful to marry them when the moment came. Meanwhile her devotion was in no need of the confirming testimony of lovers. It was sufficient in itself, and kept her mind gently occupied from morning till night. If it had occurred to her to notice that Robert Elsmere had been paying special attentions to any one in the family, she would have suggested with perfect *naïveté* that it was herself.

WESTMORELAND

For he had been to her the very pink of courtesy and consideration, and she was of opinion that 'poor Richard's' views of the degeneracy of Oxford men would have been modified could he have seen this particular specimen.

Later on in the morning Rose had been out giving Bob a run, while Agnes drove with her mother. On the way home she overtook Elsmere returning from an errand for the vicar.

'It is not so bad,' she said to him, laughing, pointing to the sky; 'we really might have gone.'

'Oh, it would have been cheerless,' he said simply. His look of depression amazed her. She felt a quick movement of sympathy, a wild wish to bid him cheer up and fight it out. If she could just have shown him Catherine as she looked last night! Why could n't she talk it out with him? Absurd conventions! She had half a mind to try.

But the grave look of the man beside her deterred even her young half-childish audacity.

'Catherine will have a good day for all her business,' she said carelessly.

He assented quietly. Oh, after that hand-shake on the bridge yesterday she could not stand it, — she must give him a hint how the land lay.

'I suppose she will spend the afternoon with Aunt Ellen. Mr. Elsmere, what did you think of Aunt Ellen?'

Elsmere started, and could not help smiling into the young girl's beautiful eyes, which were radiant with fun.

'A most estimable person,' he said. 'Are you on good terms with her, Miss Rose?'

ROBERT ELSMERE

‘Oh dear, no!’ she said, with a little face. ‘I’m not a Leyburn; I wear æsthetic dresses, and Aunt Ellen has “special leadings of the spirit” to the effect that the violin is a soul-destroying instrument. Oh dear!’ — and the girl’s mouth twisted — ‘it’s alarming to think, if Catherine had n’t been Catherine, how like Aunt Ellen she might have been!’

She flashed a mischievous look at him, and thrilled as she caught the sudden change of expression in his face.

‘Your sister has the Westmoreland strength in her — one can see that,’ he said, evidently speaking with some difficulty.

‘Strength! Oh yes. Catherine has plenty of strength,’ cried Rose, and then was silent a moment. ‘You know, Mr. Elsmere,’ she went on at last, obeying some inward impulse — ‘or perhaps you don’t know — that, at home, we are all Catherine’s creatures. She does exactly what she likes with us. When my father died she was sixteen, Agnes was ten, I was eight. We came here to live — we were not very rich, of course, and mamma was n’t strong. Well, she did everything: she taught us — we have scarcely had any teacher but her since then; she did most of the house-keeping; and you can see for yourself what she does for the neighbours and poor folk. She is never ill, she is never idle, she always knows her own mind. We owe everything we are, almost everything we have, to her. Her nursing has kept mamma alive through one or two illnesses. Our lawyer says he never knew any business affairs better managed than ours, and Catherine manages them. The one thing she never takes

WESTMORELAND

any care or thought for is herself. What we should do without her I can't imagine; and yet sometimes I think if it goes on much longer none of us three will have any character of our own left. After all, you know, it may be good for the weak people to struggle on their own feet, if the strong would only believe it, instead of always being carried. The strong people *need n't* be always trampling on themselves, — if they only knew —'

She stopped abruptly, flushing scarlet over her own daring. Her eyes were feverishly bright, and her voice vibrated under a strange mixture of feelings — sympathy, reverence, and a passionate inner admiration struggling with rebellion and protest.

They had reached the gate of the vicarage. Elsmere stopped and looked at his companion with a singular lightening of expression. He saw perfectly that the young impetuous creature understood him, that she felt his cause was not prospering, and that she wanted to help him. He saw that what she meant by this picture of their common life was that no one need expect Catherine Leyburn to be an easy prey; that she wanted to impress on him in her eager way that such lives as her sister's were not to be gathered at a touch, without difficulty, from the branch that bears them. She was exhorting him to courage, — nay, he caught more than exhortation, — a sort of secret message from her bright excited looks and incoherent speech that made his heart leap. But pride and delicacy forbade him to put his feeling into words.

'You don't hope to persuade me that your sister reckons *you* among the weak persons of the world?'

ROBERT ELSMERE

he said, laughing, his hand on the gate. Rose could have blessed him for thus turning the conversation. What on earth could she have said next?

She stood bantering a little longer, and then ran off with Bob.

Elsmere passed the rest of the morning wandering meditatively over the cloudy fells. After all he was only where he was, before the blessed madness, the upflooding hope, nay, almost certainty, of yesterday. His attack had been for the moment repulsed. He gathered from Rose's manner that Catherine's action with regard to the picnic had not been unmeaning nor accidental, as on second thoughts he had been half-trying to persuade himself. Evidently those about her felt it to be ominous. Well, then, at worst, when they met they would meet on a different footing, with a sense of something critical between them. Oh, if he did but know a little more clearly how he stood! He spent a noonday hour on a grey rock on the side of the fell between Whindale and Marrisdale, studying the path opposite, the stepping-stones, the bit of white road. The minutes passed in a kind of trance of memory. Oh, that soft childlike movement to him, after his speech about her father! that heavenly yielding and self-forgetfulness which shone in her every look and movement as she stood balancing on the stepping-stones! If after all she should prove cruel to him, would he not have a legitimate grievance, a heavy charge to fling against her maiden gentleness? He trampled on the notion. Let her do with him as she would, she would be his saint always, unquestioned, unarraigned.

WESTMORELAND

But with such a memory in his mind it was impossible that any man, least of all a man of Elsmere's temperament, could be very hopeless. Oh yes, he had been rash, foolhardy. Do such divine creatures stoop to mortal men as easily as he had dreamt? He recognises all the difficulties, he enters into the force of all the ties that bind her — or imagines that he does. But he is a man and her lover; and if she loves him, in the end love will conquer — must conquer. For his more modern sense, deeply Christianised as it is, assumes almost without argument the sacredness of passion and its claim — wherein a vast difference between himself and that solitary wrestler in Marrisdale.

Meanwhile he kept all his hopes and fears to himself. Mrs. Thornburgh was dying to talk to him; but though his mobile, boyish temperament made it impossible for him to disguise his change of mood, there was in him a certain natural dignity which life greatly developed, but which made it always possible for him to hold his own against curiosity and indiscretion. Mrs. Thornburgh had to hold her peace. As for the vicar, he developed what were for him a surprising number of new topics of conversation, and in the late afternoon took Elsmere a run up the fells to the nearest fragment of the Roman road which runs, with such magnificent disregard of the humours of Mother Earth, over the very top of High Street towards Penrith and Carlisle.

Next day it looked as though after many waverings the characteristic Westmoreland weather had descended upon them in good earnest. From early morn till late evening the valley was wrapped in damp clouds or moving rain, which swept down from the

ROBERT ELSMERE

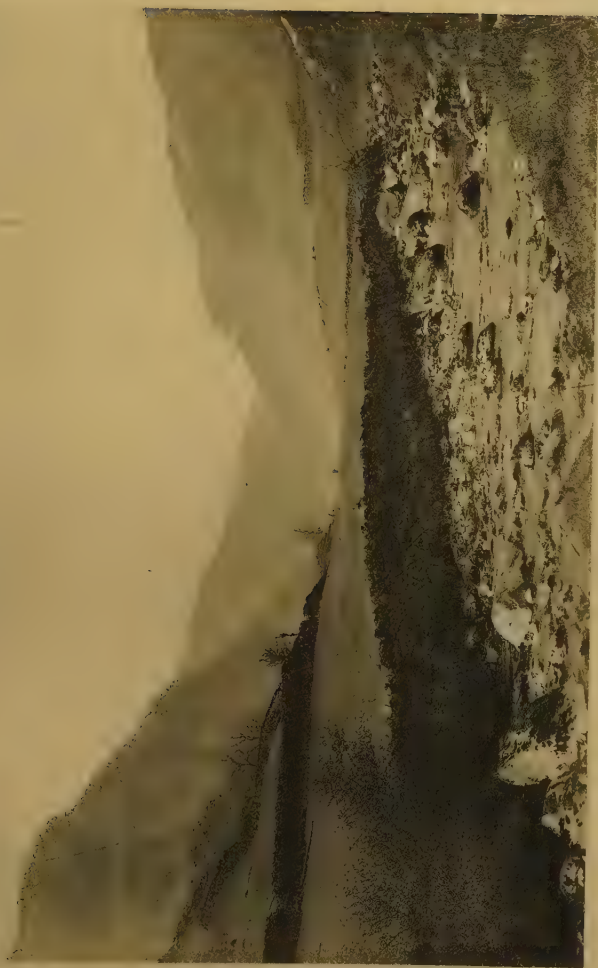
west through the great basin of the hills, and rolled along the course of the river, wrapping trees and fells and houses in the same misty cheerless drizzle. Under the outward pall of rain, indeed, the valley was renewing its summer youth; the river was swelling with an impetuous music through all its dwindled channels; the crags flung out white waterfalls again, which the heat had almost dried away; and by noon the whole green hollow was vocal with the sounds of water — water flashing and foaming in the river, water leaping downwards from the rocks, water dripping steadily from the larches and sycamores and the slate-eaves of the houses.

Elsmere sat indoors reading up the history of the parish system of Surrey, or pretending to do so. He sat in a corner of the study, where he and the vicar protected each other against Mrs. Thornburgh. That good woman would open the door once and again in the morning, and put her head through in search of prey; but on being confronted with two studious men instead of one, each buried up to the ears in folios, she would give vent to an irritable cough and retire discomfited. In reality Elsmere was thinking of nothing in the world but what Catherine Leyburn might be doing that morning. Judging a North-country woman by the pusillanimous Southern standard, he found himself glorying in the weather. She could not wander far from him to-day.

After the early dinner he escaped, just as the vicar's wife was devising an excuse on which to convey both him and herself to Burwood, and sallied forth with a mackintosh for a rush down the Whinborough road.

Whindale Valley

Sleddale



WESTMORELAND

It was still raining, but the clouds showed a momentary lightening, and a few gleams of watery sunshine brought out every now and then that sparkle on the trees, that iridescent beauty of distance and atmosphere which goes so far to make a sensitive spectator forget the petulant abundance of mountain rain. Elsmere passed Burwood with a thrill. Should he or should he not present himself? Let him push on a bit and think. So on he swung, measuring his tall frame against the gusts, spirits and masculine energy rising higher with every step. At last the passion of his mood had wrestled itself out with the weather, and he turned back once more determined to seek and find her, to face his fortunes like a man. The warm rain beating from the west struck on his uplifted face. He welcomed it as a friend. Rain and storm had opened to him the gates of a spiritual citadel. What could ever wholly close it against him any more? He felt so strong, so confident! Patience and courage!

Before him the great hollow of High Fell was just coming out from the white mists surging round it. A shaft of sunlight lay across its upper end, and he caught a marvellous apparition of a sunlit valley hung in air, a pale strip of blue above it, a white thread of stream wavering through it, and all around it and below it the rolling rain-clouds.

Suddenly between him and that enchanter's vision he saw a dark slim figure against the mists, walking before him along the road. It was Catherine — Catherine just emerged from a footpath across the fields, battling with wind and rain, and quite unconscious of any spectator. Oh, what a sudden thrill was that!

ROBERT ELSMERE

what a leaping together of joy and dread, which sent the blood to his heart! Alone — they two alone again — in the wild Westmoreland mists, and half a mile at least of winding road between them and Burwood. He flew after her, dreading, and yet longing for the moment when he should meet her eyes. Fortune had suddenly given this hour into his hands; he felt it open upon him like that mystic valley in the clouds.

Catherine heard the hurrying steps behind her and turned. There was an evident start when she caught sight of her pursuer — a quick change of expression. She wore a close-fitting waterproof dress and cap. Her hair was lightly loosened, her cheek freshened by the storm. He came up with her; he took her hand, his eyes dancing with the joy he could not hide.

‘What are you made of, I wonder!’ he said gaily. ‘Nothing, certainly, that minds weather.’

‘No Westmoreland native thinks of staying at home for this,’ she said with her quiet smile, moving on beside him as she spoke.

He looked down upon her with an indescribable mixture of feelings. No stiffness, no coldness in her manner — only the even gentleness which always marked her out from others. He felt as though yesterday were blotted out, and would not for worlds have recalled it to her or reproached her with it. Let it be as though they were but carrying on the scene of the stepping-stones.

‘Look,’ he said, pointing to the west; ‘have you been watching that magical break in the clouds?’

Her eyes followed his to the delicate picture hung high among the moving mists.

WESTMORELAND

‘Ah,’ she exclaimed, her face kindling, ‘that is one of our loveliest effects, and one of the rarest. You are lucky to have seen it.’

‘I am conceited enough,’ he said joyously, ‘to feel as if some enchanter were at work up there drawing pictures on the mists for my special benefit. How welcome the rain is! As I am afraid you have heard me say before, what new charm it gives to your valley!’

There was something in the buoyancy and force of his mood that seemed to make Catherine shrink into herself. She would not pursue the subject of Westmoreland. She asked with a little stiffness whether he had good news from Mrs. Elsmere.

‘Oh yes. As usual, she is doing everything for me,’ he said, smiling. ‘It is disgraceful that I should be idling here while she is struggling with carpenters and paperers, and puzzling out the decorations of the drawing-room. She writes to me in a fury about the word “artistic.” She declares even the little upholsterer at Churton hurls it at her every other minute, and that if it were n’t for me she would select everything as frankly, primevally hideous as she could find, just to spite him. As it is, he has so warped her judgment that she has left the sitting-room papers till I arrive. For the drawing-room she avows a passionate preference for one all cabbage-roses and no stalks; but she admits that it may be exasperation. She wants your sister, clearly, to advise her. By the way,’ and his voice changed, ‘the vicar told me last night that Miss Rose is going to Manchester for the winter to study. He heard it from Miss Agnes, I think. The news interested me greatly after our conversation.’

ROBERT ELSMERE

He looked at her with the most winning interrogative eyes. His whole manner implied that everything which touched and concerned her touched and concerned him; and, moreover, that she had given him in some sort a right to share her thoughts and difficulties. Catherine struggled with herself.

‘I trust it may answer,’ she said in a low voice.

But she would say no more, and he felt rebuffed. His buoyancy began to desert him.

‘It must be a great trial to Mrs. Elsmere,’ she said presently with an effort, once more steering away from herself and her concerns, ‘this going back to her old home.’

‘It is. My father’s long struggle for life in that house is a very painful memory. I wished her to put it off till I could go with her, but she declared she would rather get over the first week or two by herself. How I should like you to know my mother, Miss Leyburn!’

At this she could not help meeting his glance and smile, and answering them, though with a kind of constraint most unlike her.

‘I hope I may some day see Mrs. Elsmere,’ she said.

‘It is one of my strongest wishes,’ he answered hurriedly, ‘to bring you together.’

The words were simple enough; the tone was full of emotion. He was fast losing control of himself. She felt it through every nerve, and a sort of wild dread seized her of what he might say next. Oh, she must, she must prevent it!

‘Your mother was with you most of your Oxford life, was she not?’ she said, forcing herself to speak in her most everyday tones.

WESTMORELAND

He controlled himself with a mighty effort.

‘Since I became a Fellow. We have been alone in the world so long. We have never been able to do without each other.’

‘Is n’t it wonderful to you?’ said Catherine, after a little electric pause — and her voice was steadier and clearer than it had been since the beginning of their conversation — ‘how little the majority of sons and daughters regard their parents when they come to grow up and want to live their own lives? The one thought seems to be to get rid of them, to throw off their claims, to cut them adrift, to escape them — decently, of course, and under many pretexts, but still to escape them. All the long years of devotion and self-sacrifice go for nothing.’

He looked at her quickly — a troubled, questioning look.

‘It is so, often; but not, I think, where the parents have truly understood their problem. The real difficulty for father and mother is not childhood, but youth; how to get over that difficult time when the child passes into the man or woman, and a relation of governor and governed should become the purest and closest of friendships. You and I have been lucky.’

‘Yes,’ she said, looking straight before her, and still speaking with a distinctness which caught his ear painfully, ‘and so are the greater debtors! There is no excuse, I think, for any child, least of all for the child who has had years of understanding love to look back upon, if it puts its own claim first; if it insists on satisfying itself, when there is age and weakness ap-

ROBERT ELSMERE

pealing to it on the other side, when it is still urgently needed to help those older, to shield those younger, than itself. Its business first of all is to pay its debt, whatever the cost.'

The voice was low, but it had the clear vibrating ring of steel. Robert's face had darkened visibly.

'But, surely,' he cried, goaded by a new stinging sense of revolt and pain — 'surely the child may make a fatal mistake if it imagines that its own happiness counts for nothing in the parents' eyes. What parent but must suffer from the starving of the child's nature? What have mother and father been working for, after all, but the perfecting of the child's life? Their longing is that it should fulfil itself in all directions. New ties, new affections, on the child's part, mean the enriching of the parent. What a cruel fate for the elder generation, to make it the jailer and burden of the younger!'

He spoke with heat and anger, with a sense of dashing himself against an obstacle, and a dumb despairing certainty rising at the heart of him.

'Ah, that is what we are so ready to say,' she answered, her breath coming more quickly, and her eye meeting his with a kind of antagonism in it; 'but it is all sophistry. The only safety lies in following out the plain duty. The parent wants the child's help and care, the child is bound to give it; that is all it needs to know. If it forms new ties, it belongs to them, not to the old ones; the old ones must come to be forgotten and put aside.'

'So you would make all life a sacrifice to the past?' he cried, quivering under the blow she was dealing him.

WESTMORELAND

‘No, not all life,’ she said, struggling hard to preserve her perfect calm of manner: he could not know that she was trembling from head to foot. ‘There are many for whom it is easy and right to choose their own way; their happiness robs no one. There are others on whom a charge has been laid from their childhood, a charge perhaps’ — and her voice faltered at last — ‘impressed on them by dying lips, which must govern, possess their lives; which it would be baseness, treason, to betray. We are not here only to be happy.’

And she turned to him deadly pale, the faintest, sweetest smile on her lips. He was for the moment incapable of speech. He began phrase after phrase, and broke them off. A whirlwind of feeling possessed him. The strangeness, the unworldliness of what she had done struck him singularly. He realised through every nerve that what she had just said to him she had been bracing herself to say to him ever since their last parting. And now he could not tell, or rather, blindly could not see, whether she suffered in the saying it. A passionate protest rose in him, not so much against her words as against her self-control. The man in him rose up against the woman’s unlooked-for, unwelcome strength.

But as the hot words she had dared so much in her simplicity to avert from them both were bursting from him, they were checked by a sudden physical difficulty. A bit of road was under water. A little beck, swollen by the rain, had overflowed, and for a few yards’ distance the water stood about eight inches deep from hedge to hedge. Robert had splashed through the flood half an hour before, but it had risen

ROBERT ELSMERE

rapidly since then. He had to apply his mind to the practical task of finding a way to the other side.

‘You must climb the bank,’ he said, ‘and get through into the field.’

She assented mutely. He went first, drew her up the bank, forced his way through the loosely growing hedge himself, and holding back some young hazel saplings and breaking others, made an opening for her through which she scrambled with bent head; then, stretching out his hand to her, he made her submit to be helped down the steep bank on the other side. Her straight young figure was just above him, her breath almost on his cheek.

‘You talk of baseness and treason,’ he began passionately, conscious of a hundred wild impulses, as perforce she leant her light weight upon his arm. ‘Life is not so simple. It is so easy to sacrifice others with one’s self, to slay all claims in honour of one, instead of knitting the new ones to the old. Is life to be allowed no natural expansion? Have you forgotten that, in refusing the new bond for the old bond’s sake, the child may be simply wronging the parents, depriving them of another affection, another support, which ought to have been theirs?’

His tone was harsh, almost violent. It seemed to him that she grew suddenly white, and he grasped her more firmly still. She reached the level of the field, quickly withdrew her hand, and for a moment their eyes met, her pale face raised to his. It seemed an age, so much was said in that look. There was appeal on her side, passion on his. Plainly she implored him to say no more, to spare her and himself.

WESTMORELAND

‘In some cases,’ she said, and her voice sounded strained and hoarse to both of them, ‘one cannot risk the old bond. One dare not trust one’s self — or circumstance. The responsibility is too great; one can but follow the beaten path, cling to the one thread. But don’t let us talk of it any more. We must make for that gate, Mr. Elsmere. It will bring us out on the road again close by home.’

He was quelled. Speech suddenly became impossible to him. He was struck again with that sense of a will firmer and more tenacious than his own, which had visited him in a slight passing way on the first evening they ever met, and now filled him with a kind of despair. As they pushed silently along the edge of the dripping meadow, he noticed with a pang that the stepping-stones lay just below them. The gleam of sun had died away, the aërial valley in the clouds had vanished, and a fresh storm of rain brought back the colour to Catherine’s cheek. On their left hand was the roaring of the river, on their right they could already hear the wind moaning and tearing through the trees which sheltered Burwood. The Nature which an hour ago had seemed to him so full of stimulus and exhilaration had taken to herself a note of gloom and mourning; for he was at the age when Nature is the mere docile responsive mirror of the spirit, when all her forces and powers are made for us, and are only there to play chorus to our story.

They reached the little lane leading to the gate of Burwood. She paused at the foot of it.

‘You will come in and see my mother, Mr. Elsmere?’

ROBERT ELSMERE

Her look expressed a yearning she could not crush. 'Your pardon, your friendship,' it cried, with the usual futility of all good women under the circumstances. But as he met it for one passionate instant, he recognised fully that there was not a trace of yielding in it. At the bottom of the softness there was the iron of resolution.

'No, no; not now,' he said involuntarily; and she never forgot the painful struggle of the face; 'good-bye.' He touched her hand without another word, and was gone.

She toiled up to the gate with difficulty, the grey rainwashed road, the wall, the trees, swimming before her eyes.

In the hall she came across Agnes, who caught hold of her with a start.

'My dear Cathie! you have been walking yourself to death. You look like a ghost. Come and have some tea at once.'

And she dragged her into the drawing-room. Catherine submitted with all her usual outward calm, faintly smiling at her sister's onslaught. But she would not let Agnes put her down on the sofa. She stood with her hand on the back of a chair.

'The weather is very close and exhausting,' she said, gently lifting her hand to her hat. But the hand dropped, and she sank heavily into the chair.

'Cathie, you are faint,' cried Agnes, running to her.

Catherine waved her away, and, with an effort of which none but she would have been capable, mastered the physical weakness.

WESTMORELAND

‘I have been a long way, dear,’ she said, as though in apology, ‘and there is no air. Yes, I will go upstairs and lie down a minute or two. Oh no, don’t come, I will be down for tea directly.’

And refusing all help, she guided herself out of the room, her face the colour of the foam on the beck outside. Agnes stood dumbfounded. Never in her life before had she seen Catherine betray any such signs of physical exhaustion.

Suddenly Rose ran in, shut the door carefully behind her, and rushing up to Agnes put her hands on her shoulders.

‘He has proposed to her, and she has said no!’

‘He? What, Mr. Elsmere? How on earth can you know?’

‘I saw them from upstairs come to the bottom of the lane. Then he rushed on, and I have just met her on the stairs. It’s as plain as the nose on your face.’

Agnes sat down bewildered.

‘It is hard on him,’ she said at last.

‘Yes, it is *very* hard on him!’ cried Rose, pacing the room, her long, thin arms clasped behind her, her eyes flashing, ‘for she loves him!’

‘Rose!’

‘She does, my dear, she does,’ cried the girl, frowning. ‘I know it in a hundred ways.’

Agnes ruminated.

‘And it’s all because of us?’ she said at last reflectively.

‘Of course! I put it to you, Agnes’ — and Rose stood still with a tragic air — ‘I put it to you, whether it is n’t too bad that three unoffending women should

ROBERT ELSMERE

have such a rôle as this assigned them against their will!’

The eloquence of eighteen was irresistible. Agnes buried her head in the sofa cushion, and shook with a kind of helpless laughter. Rose meanwhile stood in the window, her thin form drawn up to its full height, angry with Agnes, and enraged with all the world.

‘It’s absurd, it’s insulting,’ she exclaimed. ‘I should imagine that you and I, Agnes, were old enough and sane enough to look after mamma, put out the stores, say our prayers, and prevent each other from running away with adventurers! I won’t be always in leading-strings. I won’t acknowledge that Catherine is bound to be an old maid to keep me in order. I hate it! It is sacrifice run mad.’

And Rose turned to her sister, the defiant head thrown back, a passion of manifold protest in the girlish looks.

‘It is very easy, my dear, to be judge in one’s own case,’ replied Agnes calmly, recovering herself. ‘Suppose you tell Catherine some of these home truths?’

Rose collapsed at once. She sat down despondently, and fell, head drooping, into a moody silence. Agnes watched her with a kind of triumph. When it came to the point, she knew perfectly well that there was not a will among them that could measure itself with any chance of success against that lofty but unwavering will of Catherine’s. Rose was violent, and there was much reason in her violence. But as for her, she preferred not to dash her head against stone walls.

‘Well, then, if you won’t say them to Catherine,

WESTMORELAND

say them to mamma,' she suggested presently, but half-ironically.

'Mamma is no good,' cried Rose angrily; 'why do you bring her in? Catherine would talk her round in ten minutes.'

Long after every one else in Burwood, even the chafing, excited Rose, was asleep, Catherine in her dimly lighted room, where the stormy northwest wind beat noisily against her window, was sitting in a low chair, her head leaning against her bed, her little well-worn Testament open on her knee. But she was not reading. Her eyes were shut; one hand hung down beside her, and tears were raining fast and silently over her cheeks. It was the stillest, most restrained weeping. She hardly knew why she wept, she only knew that there was something within her which must have its way. What did this inner smart and tumult mean, this rebellion of the self against the will which had never yet found its mastery fail it? It was as though from her childhood till now she had lived in a moral world whereof the aims, the dangers, the joys, were all she knew; and now the walls of this world were crumbling round her, and strange lights, strange voices, strange colours were breaking through. All the sayings of Christ which had lain closest to her heart for years, to-night for the first time seem to her no longer sayings of comfort or command, but sayings of fire and flame that burn their coercing way through life and thought. We recite so glibly, 'He that loseth his life shall save it'; and when we come to any of the common crises of experience which are the source and the sanction of the words, flesh and blood recoil.

ROBERT ELSMERE

This girl amid her mountains had carried religion as far as religion can be carried before it meets life in the wrestle appointed it. The calm, simple outlines of things are blurring before her eyes; the great placid deeps of the soul are breaking up.

To the purest ascetic temper a struggle of this kind is hardly real. Catherine felt a bitter surprise at her own pain. Yesterday a sort of mystical exaltation upheld her. What had broken it down?

Simply a pair of reproachful eyes, a pale protesting face. What trifles compared to the awful necessities of an infinite obedience! And yet they haunt her, till her heart aches for misery, till she only yearns to be counselled, to be forgiven, to be at least understood.

‘Why, why am I so weak?’ she cried in utter abasement of soul, and knew not that in that weakness, or rather in the founts of character from which it sprang, lay the innermost safeguard of her life.

CHAPTER IX

ROBERT was very nearly reduced to despair by the scene with Catherine we have described. He spent a brooding and miserable hour in the vicar's study afterwards, making up his mind as to what he should do. One phrase of hers which had passed almost unnoticed in the shock of the moment was now ringing in his ears, maddening him by a sense of joy just within his reach, and yet barred away from him by an obstacle as strong as it was intangible. '*We are not here only to be happy,*' she had said to him, with a look of ethereal exaltation worthy of her namesake of Alexandria. The words had slipped from her involuntarily in the spiritual tension of her mood. They were now filling Robert Elsmere's mind with a tormenting, torturing bliss. What could they mean? What had her paleness, her evident trouble and weakness meant, but that the inmost self of hers was his, was conquered; and that, but for the shadowy obstacle between them, all would be well?

As for the obstacle in itself, he did not admit its force for a moment. No sane and practical man, least of all when that man happened to be Catherine Leyburn's lover, could regard it as a binding obligation upon her that she should sacrifice her own life and happiness to three persons, who were in no evident moral straits, no physical or pecuniary need, and who, as Rose incoherently put it, might very well be rather

ROBERT ELSMERE

braced than injured by the withdrawal of her strong support.

But the obstacle of character — ah, there was a different matter! He realised with despair the brooding scrupulous force of moral passion to which her lonely life, her antecedents, and her father's nature working in her had given so rare and marked a development. No temper in the world is so little open to reason as the ascetic temper. How many a lover and husband, how many a parent and friend, have realised to their pain, since history began, the overwhelming attraction which all the processes of self-annihilation have for a certain order of minds! Robert's heart sank before the memory of that frail indomitable look, that aspect of sad yet immoveable conviction with which she had bade him farewell. And yet, surely — surely under the willingness of the spirit there had been a pitiful, a most womanly weakness of the flesh. Surely, now memory reproduced the scene, she had been white — trembling: her hand had rested on the moss-grown wall beside her for support. Oh, why had he been so timid? why had he let that awe of her, which her personality produced so readily, stand between them? why had he not boldly caught her to himself, and, with all the eloquence of a passionate nature, trampled on her scruples, marched through her doubts, convinced — reasoned her into a blessed submission?

‘And I will do it yet!’ he cried, leaping to his feet with a sudden access of hope and energy. And he stood a while looking out into the rainy evening, all the keen irregular face and thin pliant form hardening into the intensity of resolve, which had so often carried

WESTMORELAND

the young tutor through an Oxford difficulty, breaking down antagonism and compelling consent.

At the high tea which represented the late dinner of the household he was wary and self-possessed. Mrs. Thornburgh got out of him that he had been for a walk, and had seen Catherine, but for all her ingenuities of cross-examination she got nothing more. Afterwards, when he and the vicar were smoking together, he proposed to Mr. Thornburgh that they two should go off for a couple of days on a walking-tour to Ullswater.

'I want to go away,' he said, with a hand on the vicar's shoulder, '*and I want to come back.*' The deliberation of the last words was not to be mistaken. The vicar emitted a contented puff, looked the young man straight in the eyes, and without another word began to plan a walk to Patterdale *via* High Street, Martindale, and Howtown, and back by Haweswater.

To Mrs. Thornburgh Robert announced that he must leave them on the following Saturday, June 24.

'You *have* given me a good time, Cousin Emma,' he said to her, with a bright friendliness which dumb-founded her. A good time, indeed! with everything begun and nothing finished; with two households thrown into perturbation for a delusion, and a desirable marriage spoilt, all for want of a little common sense and plain speaking, which *one* person at least in the valley could have supplied them with, had she not been ignored and browbeaten on all sides. She contained herself, however, in his presence, but the vicar suffered proportionately in the privacy of the connubial chamber. He had never seen his wife so exasperated. To think what might have been,

ROBERT ELSMERE

what she might have done for the race, but for the whims of two stuck-up, superior, impracticable young persons, that would neither manage their own affairs nor allow other people to manage them for them! The vicar behaved gallantly, kept the secret of Elsmere's remark to himself like a man, and allowed himself certain counsels against matrimonial meddling which plunged Mrs. Thornburgh into well-simulated slumber. However, in the morning he was vaguely conscious that some time in the visions of the night his spouse had demanded of him peremptorily, 'When do you get back, William?' To the best of his memory the vicar had sleepily murmured, 'Thursday'; and had then heard, echoed through his dreams, a calculating whisper, 'He goes Saturday — one clear day!'

The following morning was gloomy but fine, and after breakfast the vicar and Elsmere started off. Robert turned back at the top of the High Fell pass and stood leaning on his alpenstock, sending a passionate farewell to the grey distant house, the upper window, the copper beech in the garden, the bit of winding road, while the vicar discreetly stepped on northward, his eyes fixed on the wild regions of Martindale.

Mrs. Thornburgh, left alone, absorbed herself to all appearance in the school treat which was to come off in a fortnight, in a new set of covers for the drawing-room, and in Sarah's love-affairs, which were always passing through some tragic phase or other, and into which Mrs. Thornburgh was allowed a more unencumbered view than she was into Catherine Leyburn's.

WESTMORELAND

Rose and Agnes dropped in now and then, and found her not at all disposed to talk to them on the great event of the day — Elsmere's absence and approaching departure. They cautiously communicated to her their own suspicions as to the incident of the preceding afternoon; and Rose gave vent to one fiery onslaught on the 'moral obstacle' theory, during which Mrs. Thornburgh sat studying her with small attentive eyes and curls slowly waving from side to side. But for once in her life the vicar's wife was not communicative in return. That the situation should have driven even Mrs. Thornburgh to *finesse* was a surprising testimony to its gravity. What between her sudden taciturnity and Catherine's pale silence, the girl's sense of expectancy was roused to its highest pitch.

'They come back to-morrow night,' said Rose thoughtfully, 'and he goes Saturday — 10.20 from Whinborough — one day for the Fifth Act! By the way, why did Mrs. Thornburgh ask us to say nothing about Saturday at home?'

She *had* asked them, however; and with a pleasing sense of conspiracy they complied.

It was late on Thursday afternoon when Mrs. Thornburgh, finding the Burwood front door open, made her unchallenged way into the hall, and after an unanswered knock at the drawing-room door, opened it and peered in to see who might be there.

'May I come in?'

Mrs. Leyburn, who was a trifle deaf, was sitting by the window absorbed in the intricacies of a heel which seemed to her more than she could manage. Her card

ROBERT ELSMERE

was mislaid, the girls were none of them at hand, and she felt as helpless as she commonly did when left alone.

‘Oh, do come in, please! So glad to see you. Have you been nearly blown away?’

For, though the rain had stopped, a boisterous northwest wind was still rushing through the valley, and the trees round Burwood were swaying and groaning under the force of its onslaught.

‘Well, it is stormy,’ said Mrs. Thornburgh, stepping in and undoing all the various safety-pins and elastics which had held her dress high above the mud. ‘Are the girls out?’

‘Yes, Catherine and Agnes are at the school; and Rose, I think, is practising.’

‘Ah, well,’ said Mrs. Thornburgh, settling herself in a chair close by her friend, ‘I wanted to find you alone.’

Her face, framed in bushy curls and an old garden bonnet, was flushed and serious. Her mittened hands were clasped nervously on her lap, and there was about her such an air of forcibly restrained excitement that Mrs. Leyburn’s mild eyes gazed at her with some astonishment. The two women were a curious contrast: Mrs. Thornburgh short, inclined, as we know, to be stout, ample and abounding in all things, whether it were curls or cap-strings or conversation; Mrs. Leyburn tall and well proportioned, well dressed, with the same graceful ways and languid pretty manners as had first attracted her husband’s attention thirty years before. She was fond of Mrs. Thornburgh, but there was something in the ebullient energies of the

WESTMORELAND

vicar's wife which always gave her a sense of bustle and fatigue.

'I am sure you will be sorry to hear,' began her visitor, 'that Mr. Elsmere is going.'

'Going?' said Mrs. Leyburn, laying down her knitting. 'Why, I thought he was going to stay with you another ten days at least.'

'So did I — so did he,' said Mrs. Thornburgh, nodding, and then pausing with a most effective air of sudden gravity and 'recollection.'

'Then why — what's the matter?' asked Mrs. Leyburn, wondering.

Mrs. Thornburgh did not answer for a minute, and Mrs. Leyburn began to feel a little nervous, her visitor's eyes were fixed upon her with so much meaning. Urged by a sudden impulse she bent forward; so did Mrs. Thornburgh, and their two elderly heads nearly touched.

'The young man is in love!' said the vicar's wife in a stage-whisper, drawing back after a pause, to see the effect of her announcement.

'Oh! with whom?' asked Mrs. Leyburn, her look brightening. She liked a love-affair as much as ever.

Mrs. Thornburgh furtively looked round to see if the door was shut and all safe — she felt herself a criminal, but the sense of guilt had an exhilarating rather than a depressing effect upon her.

'Have you guessed nothing? have the girls told you anything?'

'No!' said Mrs. Leyburn, her eyes opening wider and wider. She never guessed anything; there was no need, with three daughters to think for her, and give

ROBERT ELSMERE

her the benefit of their young brains. 'No,' she said again. 'I can't imagine what you mean.'

Mrs. Thornburgh felt a rush of inward contempt for so much obtuseness.

'Well, then, *he is in love with Catherine!*' she said abruptly, laying her hand on Mrs. Leyburn's knee, and watching the effect.

'With Catherine!' stammered Mrs. Leyburn; '*with Catherine!*'

The idea was amazing to her. She took up her knitting with trembling fingers, and went on with it mechanically a second or two. Then laying it down — 'Are you quite sure? has he told you?'

'No, but one has eyes,' said Mrs. Thornburgh hastily. 'William and I have seen it from the very first day. And we are both certain that on Tuesday she made him understand in some way or other that she would n't marry him, and that is why he went off to Ullswater, and why he made up his mind to go South before his time is up.'

'Tuesday?' cried Mrs. Leyburn. 'In that walk, do you mean, when Catherine looked so tired afterwards? You think he proposed in that walk?'

She was in a maze of bewilderment and excitement.

'Something like it — but if he did, she said "No"; and what I want to know is *why* she said "No."'

'Why, of course, because she did n't care for him!' exclaimed Mrs. Leyburn, opening her blue eyes wider and wider. 'Catherine's not like most girls; she would always know what she felt, and would never keep a man in suspense.'

'Well, I don't somehow believe,' said Mrs. Thorn-

WESTMORELAND

burgh boldly, 'that she does n't care for him. He is just the young man Catherine might care for. You can see that yourself.'

Mrs. Leyburn once more laid down her knitting and stared at her visitor. Mrs. Thornburgh, after all her meditations, had no very precise idea as to *why* she was at that moment in the Burwood drawing-room bombarding Mrs. Leyburn in this fashion. All she knew was that she had sallied forth determined somehow to upset the situation, just as one gives a shake purposely to a bundle of spillikins on the chance of more favourable openings. Mrs. Leyburn's mind was just now playing the part of spillikins, and the vicar's wife was shaking it vigorously, though with occasional qualms as to the lawfulness of the process.

'You think Catherine does care for him?' resumed Mrs. Leyburn tremulously.

'Well, is n't he just the kind of man one would suppose Catherine would like?' repeated Mrs. Thornburgh persuasively; 'he is a clergyman, and she likes serious people; and he's sensible and nice and well-mannered. And then he can talk about books, just like her father used — I'm sure William thinks he knows everything! He is n't as nice-looking as he might be just now, but then that's his hair, and his fever, poor man. And then he is n't hanging about. He's got a living, and there'd be the poor people all ready, and everything else Catherine likes. And now I'll just ask you — did you ever see Catherine more — more — *lively* — well, I know that's not just the word, but you know what I mean — than she has been the last fortnight?'

But Mrs. Leyburn only shook her head helplessly.

ROBERT ELSMERE

She did not know in the least what Mrs. Thornburgh meant. She never thought Catherine doleful, and she agreed that certainly 'lively' was not the word.

'Girls get so frightfully particular nowadays,' continued the vicar's wife, with reflective candour. 'Why, when William fell in love with me, I just fell in love with him — at once — because he did. And if it had n't been William, but somebody else, it would have been the same. I don't believe girls have got hearts like pebbles — if the man's nice, of course!'

Mrs. Leyburn listened to this summary of matrimonial philosophy with the same yielding flurried attention as she was always disposed to give to the last speaker.

'But,' she said, still in a maze, 'if she did care for him, why should she send him away?'

'*Because she won't have him!*' said Mrs. Thornburgh energetically, leaning over the arm of her chair that she might bring herself nearer to her companion.

The fatuity of the answer left Mrs. Leyburn staring.

'Because she won't have him, my dear Mrs. Leyburn! And — and — I'm sure nothing would make me interfere like this if I were n't so fond of you all, and if William and I did n't know for certain that there never was a better young man born! And then I was just sure you'd be the last person in the world, if you knew, to stand in young people's way!'

'*I!*' cried poor Mrs. Leyburn — 'I stand in the way!' She was getting tremulous and tearful, and Mrs. Thornburgh felt herself a brute.

'Well,' she said, plunging on desperately, 'I have been thinking over it night and day. I've been watch-

WESTMORELAND

ing him, and I've been talking to the girls, and I've been putting two and two together, and I'm just about sure that there might be a chance for Robert, if only Catherine did n't feel that you and the girls could n't get on without her!'

Mrs. Leyburn took up her knitting again with agitated fingers. She was so long in answering that Mrs. Thornburgh sat and thought with trepidation of all sorts of unpleasant consequences which might result from this audacious move of hers.

'I don't know how we *should* get on,' cried Mrs. Leyburn at last, with a sort of suppressed sob, while something very like a tear fell on the stocking she held.

Mrs. Thornburgh was still more frightened, and rushed into a flood of apologetic speech. Very likely she was wrong, perhaps it was all a mistake, she was afraid she had done harm, and so on. Mrs. Leyburn took very little heed, but at last she said, looking up and applying a soft handkerchief gently to her eyes —

'Is his mother nice? Where's his living? Would he want to be married soon?'

The voice was weak and tearful, but there was in it unmistakeable eagerness to be informed. Mrs. Thornburgh, overjoyed, let loose upon her a flood of particulars, painted the virtues and talents of Mrs. Elsmere, described Robert's Oxford career, with an admirable sense for effect, and a truly feminine capacity for murdering every university detail, drew pictures of the Murewell living and rectory, of which Robert had photographs with him, threw in adroit information about the young man's private means, and in general showed what may be made of a woman's mind under

ROBERT ELSMERE

the stimulus of one of the occupations most proper to it. Mrs. Leyburn brightened visibly as the flood proceeded. Alas, poor Catherine! How little room there is for the heroic in this trivial everyday life of ours!

Catherine a bride, Catherine a wife and mother, dim visions of a white soft morsel in which Catherine's eyes and smile should live again — all these thoughts went trembling and flashing through Mrs. Leyburn's mind as she listened to Mrs. Thornburgh. There is so much of the artist in the maternal mind, of the artist who longs to see the work of his hand in fresh combinations and under all points of view. Catherine, in the heat of her own self-surrender, had perhaps forgotten that her mother too had a heart!

'Yes, it all sounds very well,' said Mrs. Leyburn at last, sighing, 'but, you know, Catherine is n't easy to manage.'

'Could you talk to her — find out a little?'

'Well, not to-day; I shall hardly see her. Does n't it seem to you that when a girl takes up notions like Catherine's, she has n't time for thinking about the young men? Why, she's as full of business all day long as an egg's full of meat. Well, it was my poor Richard's doing — it was his doing, bless him! I am not going to say anything against it. But it *was* different — once.'

'Yes, I know,' said Mrs. Thornburgh thoughtfully. 'One had plenty of time, when you and I were young, to sit at home and think what one was going to wear, and how one would look, and whether *he* had been paying attention to any one else; and if he had, why; and all that. And now the young women are so su-

WESTMÖRELAND

perior. But the marrying has got to be done somehow all the same. What is she doing to-day?’

‘Oh, she’ll be busy all to-day and to-morrow; I hardly expect to see her till Saturday.’

Mrs. Thornburgh gave a start of dismay.

‘Why, what is the matter now?’ she cried in her most aggrieved tones. ‘My dear Mrs. Leyburn, one would think we had the cholera in the parish. Catherine just spoils the people.’

‘Don’t you remember,’ said Mrs. Leyburn, staring in her turn, and drawing herself up a little, ‘that to-morrow is Midsummer Day, and that Mary Backhouse is as bad as she can be?’

‘Mary Backhouse! Why, I had forgotten all about her!’ cried the vicar’s wife, with sudden remorse. And she sat pensively eyeing the carpet a while.

Then she got what particulars she could out of Mrs. Leyburn. Catherine, it appeared, was at this moment at High Ghyll, was not to return till late, and would be with the dying girl through the greater part of the following day, returning for an hour or two’s rest in the afternoon, and staying in the evening till the twilight, in which the ghost always made her appearances, should have passed into night.

Mrs. Thornburgh listened to it all, her contriving mind working the while at railway speed on the facts presented to her.

‘How do you get her home to-morrow night?’ she asked, with sudden animation.

‘Oh, we send our man Richard at ten. He takes a lantern if it’s dark.’

Mrs. Thornburgh said no more. Her eyes and ges-

ROBERT ELSMERE

tures were all alive again with energy and hope. She had given her shake to Mrs. Leyburn's mind. Much good might it do! But, after all, she had the poorest opinion of the widow's capacities as an ally.

She and her companion said a few more excited, affectionate, and apologetic things to one another, and then she departed.

Both mother and knitting were found by Agnes half an hour later in a state of considerable confusion. But Mrs. Leyburn kept her own counsel, having resolved for once, with a timid and yet delicious excitement, to act as the head of the family.

Meanwhile Mrs. Thornburgh was laying plans on her own account.

'Ten o'clock — moonlight,' said that contriving person to herself going home — 'at least if the clouds hold up — that'll do — could n't be better.'

To any person familiar with her character the signs of some unusual preoccupation were clear enough in Mrs. Leyburn during this Thursday evening. Catherine noticed them at once when she got back from High Ghyll about eight o'clock, and wondered first of all what was the matter; and then, with more emphasis, why the trouble was not immediately communicated to her. It had never entered into her head to take her mother into her confidence with regard to Elsmere. Since she could remember, it had been an axiom in the family to spare the delicate nervous mother all the anxieties and perplexities of life. It was a system in which the subject of it had always acquiesced with perfect contentment, and Catherine had no qualms

WESTMORELAND

about it. If there was good news, it was presented in its most sugared form to Mrs. Leyburn; but the moment any element of pain and difficulty cropped up in the common life, it was pounced upon and appropriated by Catherine, aided and abetted by the girls, and Mrs. Leyburn knew no more about it than an unweaned babe.

So that Catherine was thinking at most of some misconduct of a Perth dyer with regard to her mother's best grey poplin, when one of the greatest surprises of her life burst upon her.

She was in Mrs. Leyburn's bedroom that night, helping to put away her mother's things, as her custom was. She had just taken off the widow's cap, caressing as she did so the brown hair underneath which was still soft and plentiful, when Mrs. Leyburn turned upon her. 'Catherine!' she said in an agitated voice, laying a thin hand on her daughter's arm. 'Oh, Catherine, I want to speak to you!'

Catherine knelt lightly down by her mother's side, and put her arms round her waist.

'Yes, mother darling,' she said, half-smiling.

'Oh, Catherine! if — if — you like Mr. Elsmere, don't mind — don't think — about us, dear. We can manage — we can manage, dear!'

The change that took place in Catherine Leyburn's face is indescribable. She rose instantly, her arms falling behind her, her beautiful brows drawn together. Mrs. Leyburn looked up at her with a pathetic mixture of helplessness, alarm, entreaty.

'Mother, who has been talking to you about Mr. Elsmere and me?' demanded Catherine.

ROBERT ELSMERE

‘Oh, never mind, dear, never mind,’ said the widow hastily; ‘I should have seen it myself — oh, I know I should; but I’m a bad mother, Catherine!’ And she caught her daughter’s dress and drew her towards her. ‘Do you care for him?’

Catherine did not answer. She knelt down again, and laid her head on her mother’s hands.

‘I want nothing,’ she said presently in a low voice of intense emotion — ‘I want nothing but you and the girls. You are my life, I ask for nothing more. I am abundantly — content.’

Mrs. Leyburn gazed down on her with infinite perplexity. The brown hair, escaped from the cap, had fallen about her still pretty neck, a pink spot of excitement was on each gently-hollowed cheek; she looked almost younger than her pale daughter.

‘But — he is very nice,’ she said timidly. ‘And he has a good living. Catherine, you ought to be a clergyman’s wife.’

‘I ought to be, and I am your daughter,’ said Catherine, smiling a little with an unsteady lip, and kissing her hand.

Mrs. Leyburn sighed and looked straight before her. Perhaps in imagination she saw the vicar’s wife. ‘I think — I think,’ she said, very seriously, ‘I should like it!’

Catherine straightened herself brusquely at that. It was as though she had felt a blow.

‘Mother!’ she cried, with a stifled accent of pain, and yet still trying to smile, ‘do you want to send me away?’

‘No, no!’ cried Mrs. Leyburn hastily. ‘But if a nice

WESTMORELAND

man wants you to marry him, Catherine? Your father would have liked him — oh, I know your father would have liked him! And his manners to me are so pretty, I should n't mind being *his* mother-in-law. And the girls have no brother, you know, dear. Your father was always so sorry about that.'

She spoke with pleading agitation, her own tempting imaginations — the pallor, the latent storm of Catherine's look — exciting her more and more.

Catherine was silent a moment, then she caught her mother's hand again.

'Dear little mother — dear, kind little mother! You are an angel, you always are. But I think, if you'll keep me, I'll stay.'

And she once more rested her head clingly on Mrs. Leyburn's knee.

'But *do* you — *do* you love him, Catherine?'

'I love you, mother, and the girls, and my life here.'

'Oh dear,' sighed Mrs. Leyburn, as though addressing a third person, the tears in her mild eyes, 'she won't, and she *would* like it, and so should I!'

Catherine rose, stung beyond bearing.

'And I count for nothing to you, mother!' her deep voice quivering. 'You could put me aside, you and the girls, and live as though I had never been!'

'But you would be a great deal to us if you did marry, Catherine!' cried Mrs. Leyburn, almost with an accent of pettishness. 'People have to do without their daughters. There's Agnes — I often think, as it is, you might let her do more. And if Rose were troublesome, why, you know it might be a good thing

ROBERT ELSMERE

— a very good thing — if there were a man to take her in hand!’

‘And you, mother, without me?’ cried poor Catherine, choked.

‘Oh, I should come and see you,’ said Mrs. Leyburn, brightening. ‘They say it *is* such a nice house, Catherine, and such pretty country; and I’m sure I should like his mother, though she *is* Irish!’

It was the bitterest moment of Catherine Leyburn’s life. In it the heroic dream of years broke down. Nay, the shrivelling ironic touch of circumstance laid upon it made it look even in her own eyes almost ridiculous. What had she been living for, praying for, all these years? She threw herself down by the widow’s side, her face working with a passion that terrified Mrs. Leyburn.

‘Oh, mother, say you would miss me — say you would miss me if I went!’

Then Mrs. Leyburn herself broke down, and the two women clung to each other, weeping. Catherine’s sore heart was soothed a little by her mother’s tears, and by the broken words of endearment that were lavished on her. But through it all she felt that the excited imaginative desire in Mrs. Leyburn still persisted. It was the cheapening — the vulgarising, so to speak, of her whole existence.

In the course of their long embrace Mrs. Leyburn let fall various items of news that showed Catherine very plainly who had been at work upon her mother, and one of which startled her.

‘He comes back to-night, my dear — and he goes on Saturday. Oh, and, Catherine, Mrs. Thornburgh says he *does* care so much. Poor young man!’

WESTMORELAND

And Mrs. Leyburn looked up at her now standing daughter with eyes as woe-begone for Elsmere as for herself.

‘Don’t talk about it any more, mother,’ Catherine implored. ‘You won’t sleep, and I shall be more wroth with Mrs. Thornburgh than I am already.’

Mrs. Leyburn let herself be gradually soothed and coerced, and Catherine, with a last kiss to the delicate emaciated fingers, on which the worn wedding-ring lay slipping forward — in itself a history — left her at last to sleep.

‘And I don’t know much more than when I began!’ sighed the perplexed widow to herself. ‘Oh, I wish Richard was here — I do!’

Catherine’s night was a night of intense mental struggle. Her struggle was one with which the modern world has perhaps but scant sympathy. Instinctively we feel such things out of place in our easy indifferent generation. We think them more than half-unreal. We are so apt to take it for granted that the world has outgrown the religious thirst for sanctification, for a perfect moral consistency, as it has outgrown so many of the older complications of the sentiment of honour. And meanwhile half the tragedy of our time lies in this perpetual clashing of two estimates of life — the estimate which is the offspring of the scientific spirit, and which is for ever making the visible world fairer and more desirable in mortal eyes; and the estimate of St. Augustine.

As a matter of fact, owing to some travelling difficulties, the vicar and Elsmere did not get home till

ROBERT ELSMERE

noon on Friday. Catherine knew nothing of either delay or arrival. Mrs. Leyburn watched her with anxious timidity, but she never mentioned Elsmere's name to any one on the Friday morning, and no one dared speak of him to her. She came home in the afternoon from the Backhouses' absorbed apparently in the state of the dying girl, took a couple of hours' rest, and hurried off again. She passed the vicarage with bent head, and never looked up.

'She is gone!' said Rose to Agnes as she stood at the window looking after her sister's retreating figure. 'It is all over! They can't meet now. He will be off by nine to-morrow.'

The girl spoke with a lump in her throat, and flung herself down by the window, moodily watching the dark form against the fells. Catherine's coldness seemed to make all life colder and more chilling — to fling a hard denial in the face of the dearest claims of earth.

The stormy light of the afternoon was fading towards sunset. Catherine walked on fast towards the group of houses at the head of the valley, in one of which lived the two old carriers who had worked such havoc with Mrs. Thornburgh's housekeeping arrangements. She was tired, physically, but she was still more tired mentally. She had the bruised feeling of one who has been humiliated before the world and before herself. Her self-respect was for the moment crushed, and the breach made in the wholeness of personal dignity had produced a strange slackness of nerve, extending both to body and mind. She had been convicted, it seemed to her, in her own eyes, and in those

WESTMORELAND

of her world, of an egregious overestimate of her own value. She walked with hung head like one ashamed, the overstrung religious sense deepening her discomfiture at every step. How rich her life had always been in the conviction of usefulness — nay, indispensable-ness! Her mother's persuasions had dashed it from her. And religious scruple, for her torment, showed her her past, transformed, alloyed with all sorts of personal prides and cravings, which stood unmasked now in a white light.

And he? Still near her for a few short hours! Every pulse in her had thrilled as she had passed the house which sheltered him. But she will see him no more. And she is glad. If he had stayed on, he too would have discovered how cheaply they held her — those dear ones of hers for whom she had lived till now! And she might have weakly yielded to his pity what she had refused to his homage. The strong nature is half-tortured, half-soothed by the prospect of his going. Perhaps when he is gone she will recover something of that moral equilibrium which has been so shaken. At present she is a riddle to herself, invaded by a force she has no power to cope with, feeling the moral ground of years crumbling beneath her, and struggling feverishly for self-control.

As she neared the head of the valley the wind became less tempestuous. The great wall of High Fell, towards which she was walking, seemed to shelter her from its worst violence. But the hurrying clouds, the gleams of lurid light which every now and then penetrated into the valley from the west, across the dip leading to Shanmoor, the voice of the river answering

ROBERT ELSMERE

the voice of the wind, and the deep unbroken shadow that covered the group of houses and trees towards which she was walking, all served to heighten the nervous depression which had taken hold of her. As she neared the bridge, however, leading to the little hamlet, beyond which northwards all was stony loneliness and desolation, and saw in front of her the grey stone house, backed by the sombre red of a great copper beech, and overhung by crags, she had perforce to take herself by both hands, try and realise her mission afresh, and the scene which lay before her.

The Home of Mary Backhouse



CHAPTER X

MARY BACKHOUSE, the girl whom Catherine had been visiting with regularity for many weeks, and whose frail life was this evening nearing a terrible and long-expected crisis, was the victim of a fate sordid and common enough, yet not without its elements of dark poetry. Some fifteen months before this Midsummer Day she had been the mistress of the lonely old house in which her father and uncle had passed their whole lives, in which she had been born, and in which, amid snowdrifts so deep that no doctor could reach them, her mother had passed away. She had been then strong and well-favoured, possessed of a certain masculine black-browed beauty, and of a temper which sometimes gave to it an edge and glow such as an artist of ambition might have been glad to catch. At the bottom of all the outward *sauvagerie*, however, there was a heart, and strong wants, which only affection and companionship could satisfy and tame. Neither was to be found in sufficient measure within her home. Her father and she were on fairly good terms, and had for each other up to a certain point the natural instincts of kinship. On her uncle, whom she regarded as half-witted, she bestowed alternate tolerance and jeers. She was, indeed, the only person whose remonstrances ever got under the wool with old Jim, and her sharp tongue had sometimes a cowering effect on his curious nonchalance which nothing else had.

ROBERT ELSMERE

For the rest, they had no neighbours with whom the girl could fraternise, and Whinborough was too far off to provide any adequate food for her vague hunger after emotion and excitement.

In this dangerous morbid state she fell a victim to the very coarse attractions of a young farmer in the neighbouring valley of Shanmoor. He was a brute with a handsome face, and a nature in which whatever grains of heart and conscience might have been interfused with the original composition had been long since swamped. Mary, who had recklessly flung herself into his power on one or two occasions, from a mixture of motives, partly passion, partly jealousy, partly *ennui*, awoke one day to find herself ruined, and a grim future hung before her. She had realised her doom for the first time in its entirety on the Midsummer Day preceding that we are now describing. On that day she had walked over to Shanmoor in a fever of dumb rage and despair, to claim from her betrayer the fulfilment of his promise of marriage. He had laughed at her, and she had fled home in the warm rainy dusk, a prey to all those torturing terrors which only a woman *in extremis* can know. And on her way back she had seen the ghost or 'bogle' of Deep Crag; the ghost had spoken to her, and she had reached home more dead than alive, having received what she at once recognised as her death-sentence.

What had she seen? An effect of moonlight mist — a shepherd boy bent on a practical joke — a gleam of white waterfall among the darkening rocks? What had she heard? The evening greeting of a passer-by, wafted down to her from some higher path along the

WESTMORELAND

fell? distant voices in the farm enclosures beneath her feet? or simply the eerie sounds of the mountain, those weird earth-whispers which haunt the lonely places of Nature? Who can tell? Nerves and brain were strained to their uttermost. The legend of the ghost — of the girl who had thrown her baby and herself into the tarn under the frowning precipitous cliffs which marked the western end of High Fell, and who had since then walked the lonely road to Shanmoor every Midsummer Night, with her moaning child upon her arm — had flashed into Mary's mind as she left the white-walled village of Shanmoor behind her, and climbed upward with her shame and her secret into the mists. To see the bogle was merely distressing and untoward; to be spoken to by the phantom voice was death. No one so addressed could hope to survive the following Midsummer Day. Revolving these things in her mind, along with the terrible details of her own story, the exhausted girl had seen her vision, and, as she firmly believed, incurred her doom.

A week later she had disappeared from home and from the neighbourhood. The darkest stories were afloat. She had taken some money with her, and all trace of her was lost. The father had a period of gloomy taciturnity, during which his principal relief was got out of jeering and girding at his elder brother; the noodle's eyes wandered and glittered more; his shrunken frame seemed more shrunken as he sat dangling his spindle legs from the shaft of the carrier's cart; his absence of mind was for a time more marked, and excused with less buoyancy and inventiveness than usual. But otherwise all went on as before. John

ROBERT ELSMERE

Backhouse took no step, and for nine months nothing was heard of his daughter.

At last one cheerless March afternoon, Jim, coming back first from the Wednesday round with the cart, entered the farm kitchen, while John Backhouse was still wrangling at one of the other farmhouses of the hamlet about some disputed payment. The old man came in cold and weary, and the sight of the half-tended kitchen and neglected fire — they paid a neighbour to do the housework, as far as the care of her own seven children would let her — suddenly revived in his slippery mind the memory of his niece, who, with all her faults, had had the makings of a housewife, and for whom, in spite of her flouts and jeers, he had always cherished a secret admiration. As he came in he noticed that the door to the left hand, leading into what Westmoreland folk call the 'house' or sitting-room of the farm, was open. The room had hardly been used since Mary's flight, and the few pieces of black oak and shining mahogany which adorned it had long ago fallen from their pristine polish. The geraniums and fuchsias with which she had filled the window all the summer before had died into dry blackened stalks; and the dust lay heavy on the room, in spite of the well-meant but wholly ineffective efforts of the charwoman next door. The two old men had avoided the place for months past by common consent, and the door into it was hardly ever opened.

Now, however, it stood ajar, and old Jim going up to shut it, and looking in, was struck dumb with astonishment. For there on a wooden rocking-chair, which had been her mother's favourite seat, sat Mary Back-

WESTMORELAND

house, her feet on the curved brass fender, her eyes staring into the parlour grate. Her clothes, her face, her attitude of cowering chill and mortal fatigue, produced an impression which struck through the old man's dull senses, and made him tremble so that his hand dropped from the handle of the door. The slight sound roused Mary, and she turned towards him. She said nothing for a few seconds, her hollow black eyes fixed upon him; then with a ghastly smile, and a voice so hoarse as to be scarcely audible —

‘Weel, aa’ve coom back. Ye’d maybe not expect me?’

There was a sound behind on the cobbles outside the kitchen-door.

‘Yur feyther!’ cried Jim between his teeth. ‘Gang upstairs wi’ ye.’ And he pointed to a door in the wall concealing a staircase to the upper storey.

She sprang up, looked at the door and at him irresolutely, and then stayed where she was, gaunt, pale, fever-eyed, the wreck and ghost of her old self.

The steps neared. There was a rough voice in the kitchen, a surprised exclamation, and her father had pushed past his brother into the room.

John Backhouse no sooner saw his daughter than his dull weather-beaten face flamed into violence. With an oath he raised the heavy whip he held in his hand, and flung himself towards her.

‘Naw, ye’ll not du’at!’ cried Jim, throwing himself with all his feeble strength on to his brother’s arm. John swore and struggled, but the old man stuck like a limpet.

‘You let ’un aleann,’ said Mary, drawing her tat-

ROBERT ELSMERE

tered shawl over her breast. 'If he aims to kill me, aa 'll not say naa. But he need n't moider hisself! There's them abuve as ha' taken care o' that!'

She sank again into her chair, as though her limbs could not support her, and her eyes closed in the utter indifference of a fatigue which had made even fear impossible.

The father's arm dropped; he stood there sullenly looking at her. Jim, thinking she had fainted, went up to her, took a glass of water out of which she had already been drinking from the mahogany table, and held it to her lips. She drank a little, and then with a desperate effort raised herself, and clutching the arm of the chair, faced her father.

'Ye'll not hev to wait lang. Doan't ye fash yersel. Maybe it ull comfort ye to know summat! Lasst Midsummer Day aa was on t' Shanmoor road, i' t' gloaming. An' aa saw theer t' bogle — thee knaws, t' bogle o' Bleacliff Tarn; an' she turned hersel, an' she spoak to me!'

She uttered the last words with a grim emphasis, dwelling on each, the whole life of the wasted face concentrated in the terrible black eyes, which gazed past the two figures within their immediate range into a vacancy peopled with horror. Then a film came over them, the grip relaxed, and she fell back with a lurch of the rocking-chair in a dead swoon.

With the help of the neighbour from next door, Jim got her upstairs into the room that had been hers. She awoke from her swoon only to fall into the torpid sleep of exhaustion, which lasted for twelve hours.

'Keep her oot o' ma way,' said the father with an

WESTMORELAND

oath to Jim, 'or aa'll not answer nayther for her nor me!'

She needed no telling. She soon crept downstairs again, and went to the task of house-cleaning. The two men lived in the kitchen as before; when they were at home she ate and sat in the parlour alone. Jim watched her as far as his dull brain was capable of watching, and he dimly understood that she was dying. Both men, indeed, felt a sort of superstitious awe of her, she was so changed, so unearthly. As for the story of the ghost, the old popular superstitions are almost dead in the Cumbrian Mountains, and the shrewd North-country peasant is in many places quite as scornfully ready to sacrifice his ghosts to the Time Spirit as any 'bold bad' haunter of scientific associations could wish him to be. But in a few of the remoter valleys they still linger, though beneath the surface.

Either of the Backhouses, or Mary in her days of health, would have suffered many things rather than allow a stranger to suppose they placed the smallest credence in the story of Bleacliff Tarn. But, all the same, the story which each had heard in childhood, on stormy nights perhaps, when the mountain-side was awful with the sounds of tempest, had grown up with them, had entered deep into the tissue of consciousness. In Mary's imagination the ideas and images connected with it had now, under the stimulus of circumstance, become instinct with a living pursuing terror. But they were present, though in a duller, blunter state, in the minds of her father and uncle; and as the weeks passed on, and the days

ROBERT ELSMERE

lengthened towards midsummer, a sort of brooding horror seemed to settle on the house.

Mary grew weaker and weaker; her cough kept Jim awake at nights; once or twice when he went to help her with a piece of work which not even her extraordinary will could carry her through, her hand burnt him like a hot cinder. But she kept all other women out of the house by her mad, strange ways; and if her uncle showed any consciousness of her state, she turned upon him with her old temper, which had lost all its former stormy grace, and had become ghastly by the contrast it brought out between the tempestuous vindictive soul and the shaken weakness of frame.

A doctor would have discovered at once that what was wrong with her was phthisis, complicated with insanity; and the insanity, instead of taking the hopeful optimistic tinge which is characteristic of the insanity of consumption, had rather assumed the colour of the events from which the disease itself had started. Cold, exposure, long-continued agony of mind and body — the madness intertwined with an illness which had such roots as these was naturally a madness of despair. One of its principal signs was the fixed idea as to Midsummer Day. It never occurred to her as possible that her life should be prolonged beyond that limit. Every night, as she dragged herself up the steep little staircase to her room, she checked off the day which had just passed from the days she had still to live. She had made all her arrangements; she had even sewed with her own hands, and that without any sense of special horror, but rather in the provident peasant

WESTMORELAND

way, the dress in which she was to be carried to her grave.

At last one day, her father, coming unexpectedly into the yard, saw her carrying a heavy pail of water from the pump. Something stirred within him, and he went up to her and forcibly took it from her. Their looks met, and her poor mad eyes gazed intensely into his. As he moved forward towards the house she crept after him, passing him into the parlour, where she sank down breathless on the settle where she had been sleeping for the last few nights, rather than face climbing the stairs. For the first time he followed her, watching her gasping struggle for breath, in spite of her impatient motion to him to go. After a few seconds he left her, took his hat, went out, saddled his horse, and rode off to Whinborough. He got Dr. Baker to promise to come over on the morrow, and on his way back he called and requested to see Catherine Leyburn. He stammeringly asked her to come and visit his daughter who was ill and lonesome, and when she consented gladly he went on his way feeling a load off his mind. What he had just done had been due to an undefined but still vehement prompting of conscience. It did not make it any the less probable that the girl would die on or before Midsummer Day; but, supposing her story were true, it absolved him from any charge of assistance to the designs of those grisly powers in whose clutch she was.

When the doctor came next morning a change for the worse had taken place, and she was too feeble actively to resent his appearance. She lay there on the settle, every now and then making superhuman

ROBERT ELSMERE

efforts to get up, which generally ended in a swoon. She refused to take any medicine, she would hardly take any food, and to the doctor's questions she returned no answer whatever. In the same way, when Catherine came, she would be absolutely silent, looking at her with glittering, feverish eyes, but taking no notice at all, whether she read or talked, or simply sat quietly beside her.

After the silent period, as the days went on, and Midsummer Day drew nearer, there supervened a period of intermittent delirium. In the evenings, especially when her temperature rose, she became talkative and incoherent, and Catherine would sometimes tremble as she caught the sentences which, little by little, built up the girl's hidden tragedy before her eyes. London streets, London lights, London darkness, the agony of an endless wandering, the little clinging puny life, which could never be stilled or satisfied, biting cold, intolerable pain, the cheerless workhouse order, and, finally, the arms without a burden, the breast without a child — these were the sharp fragments of experience, so common, so terrible to the end of time, which rose on the troubled surface of Mary Backhouse's delirium, and smote the tender heart of the listener.

Then in the mornings she would lie suspicious and silent, watching Catherine's face with the long gaze of exhaustion, as though trying to find out from it whether her secret had escaped her. The doctor, who had gathered the story of the 'bogle' from Catherine, to whom Jim had told it, briefly and reluctantly, and with an absolute reservation of his own views on the

WESTMORELAND

matter, recommended that if possible they should try and deceive her as to the date of the day and month. Mere nervous excitement might, he thought, be enough to kill her when the actual day and hour came round. But all their attempts were useless. Nothing distracted the intense sleepless attention with which the darkened mind kept always in view that one absorbing expectation. Words fell from her at night which seemed to show that she expected a summons — a voice along the fell, calling her spirit into the dark. And then would come the shriek, the struggle to get loose, the choked waking, the wandering, horror-stricken eyes, subsiding by degrees into the old silent watch.

On the morning of the 23d, when Robert, sitting at his work, was looking at Burwood through the window in the flattering belief that Catherine was the captive of the weather, she had spent an hour or more with Mary Backhouse, and the austere influences of the visit had perhaps had more share than she knew in determining her own mood that day. The world seemed such dross, the pretences of personal happiness so hollow and delusive, after such a sight! The girl lay dying fast, with a look of extraordinary attentiveness in her face, hearing every noise, every footfall, and, as it seemed to Catherine, in a mood of inward joy. She took, moreover, some notice of her visitor. As a rough tomboy of fourteen, she had shown Catherine, who had taught her in the school sometimes, and had especially won her regard on one occasion by a present of some article of dress, a good many uncouth signs of affection. On the morning in question Catherine

ROBERT ELSMERE

fancied she saw something of the old childish expression once or twice. At any rate, there was no doubt her presence was soothing, as she read in her low vibrating voice, or sat silently stroking the emaciated hand, raising it every now and then to her lips with a rush of that intense pitifulness which was to her the most natural of all moods.

The doctor, whom she met there, said that this state of calm was very possibly only transitory. The night had been passed in a succession of paroxysms, and they were almost sure to return upon her, especially as he could get her to swallow none of the sedatives which might have carried her in unconsciousness past the fatal moment. She would have none of them; he thought that she was determined to allow of no encroachments on the troubled remnants of intelligence still left to her; so the only thing to be done was to wait and see the result. 'I will come to-morrow,' said Catherine briefly; 'for the day certainly, longer if necessary.' She had long ago established her claim to be treated seriously as a nurse, and Dr. Baker made no objection. '*If she lives so long,*' he said dubiously. 'The Backhouses and Mrs. Irwin [the neighbour] shall be close at hand. I will come in the afternoon and try to get her to take an opiate; but I can't give it her by force, and there is not the smallest chance of her consenting to it.'

All through Catherine's own struggle and pain during these two days the image of the dying girl had lain at her heart. It served her as the crucifix serves the Romanist; as she pressed it into her thought, it recovered from time to time the failing forces of the will.

WESTMORELAND

Need life be empty because self was left unsatisfied? Now, as she neared the hamlet, the quality of her nature reasserted itself. The personal want tugging at her senses, the personal soreness, the cry of resentful love, were silenced. What place had they in the presence of this lonely agony of death, this mystery, this opening beyond? The old heroic mood revived in her. Her step grew swifter, her carriage more erect, and as she entered the farm kitchen she felt herself once more ready in spirit for what lay before her.

From the next room there came a succession of husky sibilant sounds, as though some one were whispering hurriedly and continuously.

After her subdued greeting she looked inquiringly at Jim.

‘She’s in a taaking way,’ said Jim, who looked more attenuated and his face more like a pink-and-white parchment than ever. ‘She’s been knocking an’ taaking a long while. She woan’t know ye. Luke ye,’ he continued, dropping his voice as he opened the ‘house’ door for her; ‘ef you want ayder ov oos, you jest call oot — sharp! Mrs. Irwin, she’ll stay in wi’ ye — she’s not afeeard!’

The superstitious excitement which the looks and gestures of the old man expressed touched Catherine’s imagination, and she entered the room with an inward shiver.

Mary Backhouse lay raised high on her pillows, talking to herself or to imaginary other persons, with eyes wide open but vacant, and senses conscious of nothing but the dream world in which the mind was wandering. Catherine sat softly down beside her, un-

ROBERT ELSMERE

noticed, thankful for the chances of disease. If this delirium lasted till the ghost-hour — the time of twilight, that is to say, which would begin about half-past eight, and the duration of which would depend on the cloudiness of the evening — was over, or, better still, till midnight were past, the strain on the girl's agonised senses might be relieved, and death come at last in softer, kinder guise.

'Has she been long like this?' she asked softly of the neighbour who sat quietly knitting by the evening light.

The woman looked up and thought.

'Aye!' she said. 'Aa came in at tea-time, an' she's been maistly taakin' ivver sence!'

The incoherent whisperings and restless movements, which obliged Catherine constantly to replace the coverings over the poor wasted and fevered body, went on for some time. Catherine noticed presently, with a little thrill, that the light was beginning to change. The weather was growing darker and stormier; the wind shook the house in gusts; and the farther shoulder of High Fell, seen in distorted outline through the casemented window, was almost hidden by the trailing rain-clouds. The mournful western light coming from behind the house struck the river here and there; almost everything else was grey and dark. A mountain-ash, just outside the window, brushed the panes every now and then; and in the silence every surrounding sound — the rare movements in the next room, the voices of quarrelling children round the door of a neighbouring house, the far-off barking of dogs — made itself distinctly audible.

WESTMORELAND

Suddenly Catherine, sunk in painful reverie, noticed that the mutterings from the bed had ceased for some little time. She turned her chair, and was startled to find those weird eyes fixed with recognition on herself. There was a curious malign intensity, a curious triumph in them.

‘It must be — eight o’clock,’ said the gasping voice — ‘*eight o’clock*’; and the tone became a whisper, as though the idea thus half-involuntarily revealed had been drawn jealously back into the strongholds of consciousness.

‘Mary,’ said Catherine, falling on her knees beside the bed, and taking one of the restless hands forcibly into her own, ‘can’t you put this thought away from you? We are not the playthings of evil spirits — we are the children of God! We are in His hands. No evil thing can harm us against His will.’

It was the first time for many days she had spoken openly of the thought which was in the mind of all, and her whole pleading soul was in her pale, beautiful face. There was no response in the sick girl’s countenance, and again that look of triumph, of sinister exultation. They had tried to cheat her into sleeping, and living, and in spite of them, at the supreme moment, every sense was awake and expectant. To what was the materialised peasant imagination looking forward? To an actual call, an actual following to the free mountain-side, the rush of the wind, the phantom figure floating on before her, bearing her into the heart of the storm? Dread was gone, pain was gone; there was only rapt excitement and fierce anticipation.

‘Mary,’ said Catherine again, mistaking her mood

ROBERT ELSMERE

for one of tense defiance and despair, 'Mary, if I were to go out now and leave Mrs. Irwin with you, and if I were to go up all the way to the top of Shanmoss and back again, and if I could tell you there was nothing there, nothing! — if I were to stay out till the dark has come — it will be here in half an hour — and you could be quite sure, when you saw me again, that there was nothing near you but the dear old hills, and the power of God, could you believe me and try and rest and sleep?'

Mary looked at her intently. If Catherine could have seen clearly in the dim light she would have caught something of the cunning of madness slipping into the dying woman's expression. While she waited for the answer there was a noise in the kitchen outside, an opening of the outer door, and a voice. Catherine's heart stood still. She had to make a superhuman effort to keep her attention fixed on Mary.

'Go!' said the hoarse whisper close beside her, and the girl lifted her wasted hand, and pushed her visitor from her. 'Go!' it repeated insistently, with a sort of wild beseeching; then, brokenly, the gasping breath interrupting, 'There's naw fear — naw fear — fur the likes o' you!'

Catherine rose.

'I'm not afraid,' she said gently, but her hand shook as she pushed her chair back; 'God is everywhere, Mary.'

She put on her hat and cloak, said something in Mrs. Irwin's ear, and stooped to kiss the brow which to the shuddering sense under her will seemed already cold and moist with the sweats of death. Mary watched

WESTMORELAND

her go; Mrs. Irwin, with the air of one bewildered, drew her chair nearer to the settle; and the light of the fire, shooting and dancing through the June twilight, threw such fantastic shadows over the face on the pillow that all expression was lost. What was moving in the crazed mind? Satisfaction, perhaps, at having got rid of one witness, one jailer, one of the various antagonistic forces surrounding her? She had a dim frenzied notion she should have to fight for her liberty when the call came, and she lay tense and rigid, waiting — the images of insanity whirling through her brain, while the light slowly, slowly waned.

Catherine opened the door into the kitchen. The two carriers were standing there, and Robert Elsmere also stood with his back to her, talking to them in an undertone.

He turned at the sound behind him, and his start brought a sudden flush to Catherine's cheek. Her face, as the candle-light struck it amid the shadows of the doorway, was like an angelic vision to him — the heavenly calm of it just exquisitely broken by the wonder, the shock, of his presence.

'You here?' he cried, coming up to her, and taking her hand — what secret instinct guided him? — close in both of his. 'I never dreamt of it — so late. My cousin sent me over — she wished for news.'

She smiled involuntarily. It seemed to her she had expected this in some sort all along. But her self-possession was complete.

'The excited state may be over in a short time now,' she answered him in a quiet whisper; 'but at present it is at its height. It seemed to please her' — and

ROBERT ELSMERE

withdrawing her hand she turned to John Backhouse — ‘when I suggested that I should walk up to Shanmoss and back. I said I would come back to her in half an hour or so, when the daylight was quite gone, and prove to her there was nothing on the path.’

A hand caught her arm. It was Mrs. Irwin, holding the door close with the other hand.

‘Miss Leyburn — Miss Catherine! Yur not gawin’ oot — not gawin’ oop *that* path?’ The woman was fond of Catherine, and looked deadly frightened.

‘Yes, I am, Mrs. Irwin — but I shall be back very soon. Don’t leave her; go back.’ And Catherine motioned her back with a little peremptory gesture.

‘Doan’t ye let ’ur, sir,’ said the woman excitedly to Robert. ‘One’s eneuf, aa’m thinking.’ And she pointed with a meaning gesture to the room behind her.

Robert looked at Catherine, who was moving towards the outer door.

‘I’ll go with her,’ he said hastily, his face lighting up. ‘There is nothing whatever to be afraid of, only don’t leave your patient.’

Catherine trembled as she heard the words, but she made no sign, and the two men and the woman watched their departure with blank uneasy wonderment. A second later they were on the fell-side climbing a rough stony path, which in places was almost a watercourse, and which wound up the fell towards a tract of level swampy moss or heath, beyond which lay the descent to Shanmoor. Daylight was almost gone; the stormy yellow west was being fast swallowed up in cloud; below them as they climbed lay the dark group

WESTMORELAND

of houses, with a light twinkling here and there. All about them were black mountain forms; a desolate tempestuous wind drove a gusty rain into their faces; a little beck roared beside them, and in the distance from the black gulf of the valley the swollen river thundered.

Elsmere looked down on his companion with an indescribable exultation, a passionate sense of possession which could hardly restrain itself. He had come back that morning with a mind clearly made up. Catherine had been blind indeed when she supposed that any plan of his or hers would have been allowed to stand in the way of that last wrestle with her, of which he had planned all the methods, rehearsed all the arguments. But when he reached the vicarage he was greeted with the news of her absence. She was inaccessible it appeared for the day. No matter! The vicar and he settled in the fewest possible words that he should stay till Monday, Mrs. Thornburgh meanwhile looking on, saying what civility demanded, and surprisingly little else. Then in the evening Mrs. Thornburgh had asked of him with a manner of admirable indifference whether he felt inclined for an evening walk to High Ghyll to inquire after Mary Backhouse. The request fell in excellently with a lover's restlessness, and Robert assented at once. The vicar saw him go with puzzled brows and a quick look at his wife, whose head was bent close over her worsted work.

It never occurred to Elsmere — or if it did occur, he pooh-poohed the notion — that he should find Catherine still at her post far from home on this dark

stormy evening. But in the glow of joy which her presence had brought him he was still capable of all sorts of delicate perceptions and reasonings. His quick imagination carried him through the scene from which she had just momentarily escaped. He had understood the exaltation of her look and tone. If love spoke at all, ringed with such surroundings, it must be with its most inward and spiritual voice, as those speak who feel 'the Eternities' about them.

But the darkness hid her from him so well that he had to feel out the situation for himself. He could not trace it in her face.

'We must go right up to the top of the pass,' she said to him as he held a gate open for her which led them into a piece of larch plantation on the mountain-side. 'The ghost is supposed to walk along this bit of road above the houses, till it reaches the heath on the top, and then it turns towards Bleacliff Tarn, which lies higher up to the right, under High Fell.'

'Do you imagine your report will have any effect?'

'At any rate,' she said, sighing, 'it seemed to me that it might divert her thoughts a little from the actual horror of her own summons. Anything is better than the torture of that one fixed idea as she lies there.'

'What is that?' said Robert, startled a little by some ghostly sounds in front of them. The little wood was almost dark, and he could see nothing.

'Only a horse trotting on in front of us,' said Catherine; 'our voices frightened him, I suppose. We shall be out on the fell again directly.'

WESTMORELAND

And as they quitted the trees, a dark bulky form to the left suddenly lifted a shadowy head from the grass, and clattered down the slope.

A cluster of white-stemmed birches just ahead of them caught whatever light was still left in the atmosphere, their feathery tops bending and swaying against the sky.

‘How easily, with mind attuned, one could people this whole path with ghosts!’ said Robert. ‘Look at those stems and that line of stream coming down to the right, and listen to the wind among the fern.’

For they were passing a little gully deep in bracken, up which the blast was tearing its tempestuous way.

Catherine shivered a little, and the sense of physical exhaustion, which had been banished like everything else — doubt, humiliation, bitterness — by the one fact of his presence, came back on her.

‘There is something rather awful in this dark and storm,’ she said, and paused.

‘Would you have faced it alone?’ he asked, his voice thrilling her with a hundred different meanings. ‘I am glad I prevented it.’

‘I have no fear of the mountains,’ she said, trembling. ‘I know them, and they me.’

‘But you are tired — your voice is tired — and the walk might have been more of an effort than you thought it. Do you never think of yourself?’

‘Oh dear, yes,’ said Catherine, trying to smile, and could find nothing else to say. They walked on a few moments in silence, splashes of rain breaking in their faces. Robert’s inward excitement was growing fast. Suddenly Catherine’s pulse stood still. She felt her

ROBERT ELSMERE

hand lifted, drawn within his arm, covered close with his warm trembling clasp.

‘Catherine, let it stay there. Listen one moment. You gave me a hard lesson yesterday, too hard — I cannot learn it — I am bold — I claim you. Be my wife. Help me through this difficult world. I have loved you from the first moment. Come to me. Be kind to me.’

She could hardly see his face, but she could feel the passion in his voice and touch. Her cheek seemed to droop against his arm. He felt her tottering.

‘Let me sit down,’ she said; and after one moment of dizzy silence he guided her to a rock, sinking down himself beside her, longing, but not daring, to shelter her under his broad Inverness cloak against the storm.

‘I told you,’ she said, almost whispering, ‘that I was bound, tied to others.’

‘I do not admit your plea,’ he said passionately; ‘no, not for a moment. For two days have I been tramping over the mountains thinking it out for yourself and me. Catherine, your mother has no son — she should find one in me. I have no sisters — give me yours. I will cherish them as any brother could. Come and enrich my life; you shall still fill and shelter theirs. I dare not think what my future might be with you to guide, to inspire, to bless — dare not, lest with a word you should plunge me into an outer darkness I cannot face.’

He caught her unresisting hand, and raised it to his lips.

‘Is there no sacredness,’ he said brokenly, ‘in the fate that has brought us together — out of all the

WESTMORELAND

world — here in this lonely valley? Come to me, Catherine. You shall never fail the old ties, I promise you; and new hands shall cling to you — new voices shall call you blessed.'

Catherine could hardly breathe. Every word had been like balm upon a wound — like a ray of intense light in the gloom about them. Oh, where was this softness bearing her — this emptiness of all will, of all individual power? She hid her eyes with her other hand, struggling to recall that far-away moment in Marrisdale. But the mind refused to work. Consciousness seemed to retain nothing but the warm grasp of his hand — the tones of his voice.

He saw her struggle, and pressed on remorselessly.

'Speak to me — say one little kind word. Oh, you cannot send me away miserable and empty!'

She turned to him, and laid her trembling free hand on his arm. He clasped them both with rapture.

'Give me a little time.'

'No, no,' he said, and it almost seemed to her that he was smiling: 'time for you to escape me again, my wild mountain bird; time for you to think yourself and me into all sorts of moral mists! No, you shall not have it. Here, alone with God and the dark — bless me or undo me. Send me out to the work of life maimed and sorrowful, or send me out your knight, your possession, pledged —'

But his voice failed him. What a note of youth, of imagination, of impulsive eagerness there was through it all! The more slowly-moving inarticulate nature was swept away by it. There was but one object clear to her in the whole world of thought or sense, every-

ROBERT ELSMERE

thing else had sunk out of sight — drowned in a luminous mist.

He rose and stood before her as he delivered his ultimatum, his tall form drawn up to its full height. In the east, across the valley, above the farther but-tress of High Fell, there was a clearer strip of sky, visible for a moment among the moving storm-clouds, and a dim haloed moon shone out in it. Far away a white-walled cottage glimmered against the fell ; the pools at their feet shone in the weird passing light.

She lifted her head, and looked at him, still irresolute. Then she too rose, and helplessly, like some one impelled by a will not her own, she silently held out to him two white trembling hands.

‘Catherine — my angel — my wife!’

There was something in the pale virginal grace of look and form which kept his young passion in awe. But he bent his head again over those yielding hands, kissing them with dizzy unspeakable joy.

About twenty minutes later Catherine and Robert, having hurried back with all speed from the top of Shanmoss, reached the farmhouse door. She knocked. No one answered. She tried the lock ; it yielded, and they entered. No one in the kitchen. She looked disturbed and conscience-stricken.

‘Oh!’ she cried to him, under her breath ; ‘have we been too long?’ And hurrying into the inner room she left him waiting.

Inside was a mournful sight. The two men and Mrs. Irwin stood close round the settle, but as she came nearer, Catherine saw Mary Backhouse lying panting

WESTMORELAND

on her pillows, her breath coming in loud gasps, her dress and all the coverings of the bed showing signs of disorder and confusion, her black hair tossed about her.

‘It’s bin awfu’ work sence you left, miss,’ whispered Mrs. Irwin to Catherine excitedly, as she joined them. ‘She thowt she heerd soombody fleytin’ and callin’ — it was t’ wind came skirlin’ round t’ place, an’ she aw’ but thrown hirsels’ oot o’ t’ bed, an’ aa shooted for Jim, and they came, and they and I — it’s bin as much as we could a’ du to hod ’er.’

‘Luke! Steady!’ exclaimed Jim. ‘She’ll try it again.’

For the hands were moving restlessly from side to side, and the face was working again. There was one more desperate effort to rise, which the two men checked — gently enough, but effectually — and then the exhaustion seemed complete. The lids fell, and the struggle for breath was pitiful.

Catherine flew for some drugs which the doctor had left, and shown her how to use. After some twenty minutes they seemed to give relief, and the great haunted eyes opened once more.

Catherine held barley-water to the parched lips, and Mary drank mechanically, her gaze still intently fixed on her nurse. When Catherine put down the glass the eyes followed her with a question which the lips had no power to frame.

‘Leave her now a little,’ said Catherine to the others. ‘The fewer people and the more air the better. And please let the door be open; the room is too hot.’

They went out silently, and Catherine sank down

ROBERT ELSMERE

beside the bed. Her heart went out in unspeakable longing towards the poor human wreck before her. For her there was no morrow possible, no dawn of other and softer skies. All was over : life was lived, and all its heavenly capabilities missed for ever. Catherine felt her own joy hurt her, and her tears fell fast.

‘Mary,’ she said, laying her face close beside the chill face on the pillow, ‘Mary, I went out ; I climbed all the path as far as Shanmoss. There was nothing evil there. Oh, I must tell you ! *Can* I make you understand ? I want you to feel that it is only God and love that are real. Oh, think of them ! He would not let you be hurt and terrified in your pain, poor Mary. He loves you. He is waiting to comfort you — to set you free from pain for ever ; and He has sent you a sign by me.’ . . . She lifted her head from the pillow, trembling and hesitating. Still that feverish questioning gaze on the face beneath her, as it lay in deep shadow cast by a light on the window-sill some paces away.

‘You sent me out, Mary, to search for something, the thought of which has been tormenting and torturing you. You thought God would let a dark lost spirit trouble you and take you away from Him — you, His child, whom He made and whom He loves ! And listen ! While you thought you were sending me out to face the evil thing, you were really my kind angel — God’s messenger — sending me to meet the joy of my whole life !

‘There was some one waiting here just now,’ she went on hurriedly, breathing her sobbing words into Mary’s ear. ‘Some one who has loved me, and whom I love. But I had made him sad, and myself ; then

WESTMORELAND

when you sent me out he came too ; we walked up that path, you remember, beyond the larchwood, up to the top, where the stream goes under the road. And there he spoke to me, and I could n't help it any more. And I promised to love him and be his wife. And if it had n't been for you, Mary, it would never have happened. God had put it into your hand, this joy, and I bless you for it! Oh, and Mary — Mary — it is only for a little little while, this life of ours! Nothing matters — not our worst sin and sorrow — but God, and our love to Him. I shall meet you some day — I pray I may — in His sight and all will be well, the pain all forgotten — all!

She raised herself again and looked down with yearning passionate pity on the shadowed form. Oh, blessed answer of heart to heart! There were tears forming under the heavy lids, the corners of the lips were relaxed and soft. Slowly the feeble hand sought her own. She waited in an intense expectant silence.

There was a faint breathing from the lips; she stooped and caught it.

'Kiss me!' said the whisper; and she laid her soft fresh lips to the parched mouth of the dying. When she lifted her head again Mary still held her hand; Catherine softly stretched out hers for the opiate Dr. Baker had left; it was swallowed without resistance, and a quiet to which the invalid had been a stranger for days stole little by little over the wasted frame. The grasp of the fingers relaxed, the laboured breath came more gently, and in a few more minutes she slept. Twilight was long over. The ghost-hour was past, and

ROBERT ELSMERE

the moon outside was slowly gaining a wider empire in the clearing heavens.

It was a little after ten o'clock when Rose drew aside the curtain at Burwood and looked out.

'There is the lantern,' she said to Agnes, 'just by the vicarage. How the night has cleared!'

She turned back to her book. Agnes was writing letters. Mrs. Leyburn was sitting by the bit of fire that was generally lit for her benefit in the evenings, her white shawl dropping gracefully about her, a copy of the *Cornhill* on her lap. But she was not reading, she was meditating, and the girls thought her out of spirits. The hall-door opened.

'There is some one with Catherine!' cried Rose, starting up. Agnes suspended her letter.

'Perhaps the vicar,' said Mrs. Leyburn, with a little sigh.

A hand turned the drawing-room door, and in the doorway stood Elsmere. Rose caught a grey dress disappearing up the little stairs behind him.

Elsmere's look was enough for the two girls. They understood in an instant. Rose flushed all over. The first contact with love is intoxicating to any girl of eighteen, even though the romance be not hers. But Mrs. Leyburn sat bewildered.

Elsmere went up to her, stooped and took her hand.

'Will you give her to me, Mrs. Leyburn?' he said, his boyish looks aglow, his voice unsteady. 'Will you let me be a son to you?'

Mrs. Leyburn rose. He still held her hand. She looked up at him helplessly.

WESTMORELAND

‘Oh, Mr. Elsmere, where is Catherine?’

‘I brought her home,’ he said gently. ‘She is mine, if you will it. Give her to me again!’

Mrs. Leyburn’s face worked pitifully. The rectory and the wedding-dress, which had lingered so regretfully in her thoughts since her last sight of Catherine, sank out of them altogether.

‘She has been everything in the world to us, Mr. Elsmere.’

‘I know she has,’ he said simply. ‘She shall be everything in the world to you still. I have had hard work to persuade her. There will be no chance for me if you don’t help me.’

Another breathless pause. Then Mrs. Leyburn timidly drew him to her, and he stooped his tall head and kissed her like a son.

‘Oh, I must go to Catherine!’ she said, hurrying away, her pretty withered cheeks wet with tears.

Then the girls threw themselves on Elsmere. The talk was all animation and excitement for the moment, not a tragic touch in it. It was as well perhaps that Catherine was not there to hear!

‘I give you fair warning,’ said Rose, as she bade him good-night, ‘that I don’t know how to behave to a brother. And I am equally sure that Mrs. Thornburgh does n’t know how to behave to a *fiancé*.’

Robert threw up his arms in mock terror at the name, and departed.

‘We are abandoned,’ cried Rose, flinging herself into the chair again — then with a little flash of half-irresolute wickedness — ‘and we are free! Oh, I hope she will be happy!’

ROBERT ELSMERE

And she caught Agnes wildly round the neck as though she would drown her first words in her last.

‘Madcap!’ cried Agnes, struggling. ‘Leave me at least a little breath to wish Catherine joy!’

And they both fled upstairs.

There was indeed no prouder woman in the three kingdoms than Mrs. Thornburgh that night. After all the agitation downstairs she could not persuade herself to go to bed. She first knocked up Sarah and communicated the news; then she sat down before a pier-glass in her own room studying the person who had found Catherine Leyburn a husband.

‘My doing from beginning to end,’ she cried with a triumph beyond words. ‘William has had *nothing* to do with it. Robert has had scarcely as much. And to think how little I dreamt of it when I began. Well, to be sure, no one could have *planned* marrying those two. There’s no one but Providence could have foreseen it — they’re so different. And after all it’s *done*. Now then, whom shall I have next year?’

BOOK II

SURREY

CHAPTER XI

FAREWELL to the mountains!

The scene in which the next act of this unpretending history is to run its course is of a very different kind. In place of the rugged Northern Nature — a Nature wild and solitary indeed, but still rich, luxuriant, and friendly to the senses of the traveller, even in its loneliest places. The heaths and woods of some districts of Surrey are scarcely more thickly peopled than the fells of Westmoreland; the walker may wander for miles, and still enjoy an untamed primitive earth, guiltless of boundary or furrow, the undisturbed home of all that grows and flies, where the rabbits, the lizards, and the birds live their life as they please, either ignorant of intruding man or strangely little incommoded by his neighbourhood. And yet there is nothing forbidding or austere in these wide solitudes. The patches of graceful birch-wood; the miniature lakes nestling among them; the brakes of ling — pink, faintly scented, a feast for every sense; the stretches of purple heather, glowing into scarlet under the touch of the sun; the scattered farmhouses, so mellow in colour, so pleasant in outline; the general softness and lavishness of the earth and all it bears, make these Surrey commons not a wilderness but a paradise. Nature, indeed, here is like some spoilt petulant child. She will bring forth nothing, or almost nothing, for man's grosser needs. Ask her to bear corn or pasture

ROBERT ELSMERE

flocks, and she will be miserly and grudging. But ask her only to be beautiful, enticing, capriciously lovely, and she will throw herself into the task with all the abandonment, all the energy, that heart could wish.

It is on the borders of one of the wilder districts of a county, which is throughout a strange mixture of suburbanism and the desert, that we next meet with Robert and Catherine Elsmere. The rectory of Murewell occupied the highest point of a gentle swell of ground which sloped through cornfields and woods to a plain of boundless heather on the south, and climbed away on the north towards the long chalk ridge of the Hog's Back. It was a square white house pretending neither to beauty nor state, a little awkwardly and barely placed, with only a small stretch of grass and a low hedge between it and the road. A few tall firs climbing above the roof gave a little grace and clothing to its southern side, and behind it there was a garden sloping softly down towards the village at its foot — a garden chiefly noticeable for its grass walks, the luxuriance of the fruit-trees clinging to its old red walls, and the masses of pink-and-white phloxes which now in August gave it the floweriness and the gaiety of an Elizabethan song. Below in the hollow and to the right lay the picturesque medley of the village — roofs and gables and chimneys, yellow-grey thatch, shining whitewash, and mellowed brick, making a bright patchwork among the softening trees, thin wreaths of blue smoke, like airy ribbons, tangled through it all. Rising over the rest was a house of some dignity. It had been an old manor-house, now it was half-ruinous and the village inn. Some generations back the squire

Murewell Rectory



SURREY

of the day had dismantled it, jealous that so big a house should exist in the same parish as the Hall, and the spoils of it had furnished the rectory; so that the homely house was fitted inside with mahogany doors and carved cupboard fronts, in which Robert delighted, and in which even Catherine felt a proprietary pleasure.

Altogether a quiet, rural, English spot. If the house had no beauty, it commanded a world of loveliness. All around it — north, south, and west — there spread, as it were, a vast playground of heather and wood and grassy common, in which the few workaday patches of hedge and ploughed land seemed engulfed and lost. Close under the rectory windows, however, was a vast sloping cornfield, belonging to the glebe, the largest and fruitfulest of the neighbourhood. At the present moment it was just ready for the reaper — the golden ears had clearly but a few more days or hours to ripple in the sun. It was bounded by a dark summer-scorched belt of wood, and beyond, over the distance, rose a blue pointed hill, which seemed to be there only to attract and make a centre for the sunsets.

As compared with her Westmoreland life, the first twelve months of wifehood had been to Catherine Elsmere a time of rapid and changing experience. A few days out of their honeymoon had been spent at Oxford. It was a week before the opening of the October term, but many of the senior members of the University were already in residence, and the stagnation of the Long Vacation was over. Langham was up; so was Mr. Grey, and many another old friend of Robert's. The bride and bridegroom were much fêted in a quiet

ROBERT ELSMERE

way. They dined in many common rooms and bursaries; they were invited to many luncheons, whereat the superabundance of food and the length of time spent upon it made the Puritan Catherine uncomfortable; and Langham devoted himself to taking the wife through colleges and gardens, Schools and Bodleian, in most orthodox fashion, indemnifying himself afterwards for the sense of constraint her presence imposed upon him by a talk and a smoke with Robert.

He could not understand the Elsmere marriage. That a creature so mobile, so sensitive, so susceptible as Elsmere should have fallen in love with this stately silent woman, with her very evident rigidities of thought and training, was only another illustration of the mysteries of matrimony. He could not get on with her, and after a while did not try to do so.

There could be no doubt as to Elsmere's devotion. He was absorbed, wrapped up in her.

'She has affected him,' thought the tutor, 'at a period of life when he is more struck by the difficulty of being morally strong than by the difficulty of being intellectually clear. The touch of religious genius in her braces him like the breath of an Alpine wind. One can see him expanding, glowing under it. *Bien!* sooner he than I. To be fair, however, let me remember that she decidedly does not like me — which may cut me off from Elsmere. However' — and Langham sighed over his fire — 'what have he and I to do with one another in the future? By all the laws of character something untoward might come out of this marriage. But she will mould him, rather than he her. Besides, she will have children — and that solves most things.'

SURREY

Meanwhile, if Langham dissected the bride as he dissected most people, Robert, with that keen observation which lay hidden somewhere under his careless boyish ways, noticed many points of change about his old friend. Langham seemed to him less human, more strange, than ever; the points of contact between him and active life were lessening in number term by term. He lectured only so far as was absolutely necessary for the retention of his post, and he spoke with wholesale distaste of his pupils. He had set up a book on 'The Schools of Athens,' but when Robert saw the piles of disconnected notes already accumulated, he perfectly understood that the book was a mere blind, a screen, behind which a difficult fastidious nature trifled and procrastinated as it pleased.

Again, when Elsmere was an undergraduate Langham and Grey had been intimate. Now, Langham's tone *à propos* of Grey's politics and Grey's dreams of Church Reform was as languidly sarcastic as it was with regard to most of the strenuous things of life. 'Nothing particular is true,' his manner said, 'and all action is a degrading *pis-aller*. Get through the day somehow, with as little harm to yourself and other people as may be; do your duty if you like it, but, for heaven's sake, don't cant about it to other people!'

If the affinities of character count for much, Catherine and Henry Grey should certainly have understood each other. The tutor liked the look of Elsmere's wife. His kindly brown eyes rested on her with pleasure; he tried in his shy but friendly way to get at her, and there was in both of them a touch of homeliness, a sheer power of unworldliness that should have drawn

ROBERT ELSMERE

them together. And indeed Catherine felt the charm, the spell of this born leader of men. But she watched him with a sort of troubled admiration, puzzled, evidently, by the halo of moral dignity surrounding him, which contended with something else in her mind respecting him. Some words of Robert's, uttered very early in their acquaintance, had set her on her guard. Speaking of religion, Robert had said, 'Grey is not one of us'; and Catherine, restrained by a hundred ties of training and temperament, would not surrender herself, and could not if she would.

Then had followed their home-coming to the rectory, and that first institution of their common life, never to be forgotten for the tenderness and the sacredness of it. Mrs. Elsmere had received them, and had then retired to a little cottage of her own close by. She had of course already made the acquaintance of her daughter-in-law, for she had been the Thornburghs' guest for ten days before the marriage in September, and Catherine, moreover, had paid her a short visit earlier in the summer. But it was now that for the first time she realised to the full the character of the woman Robert had married. Catherine's manner to her was sweetness itself. Parted from her own mother as she was, the younger woman's strong filial instincts spent themselves in tending the mother who had been the guardian and life of Robert's youth. And Mrs. Elsmere in return was awed by Catherine's moral force and purity of nature, and proud of her personal beauty, which was so real, in spite of the severity of the type, and to which marriage had given, at any rate for the moment, a certain added softness and brilliancy.

SURREY

But there were difficulties in the way. Catherine was a little too apt to treat Mrs. Elsmere as she would have treated her own mother. But to be nursed and protected, to be screened from draughts, and run after with shawls and stools was something wholly new and intolerable to Mrs. Elsmere. She could not away with it, and as soon as she had sufficiently lost her first awe of her daughter-in-law she would revenge herself in all sorts of droll ways, and with occasional flashes of petulant Irish wit which would make Catherine colour and draw back. Then Mrs. Elsmere, touched with remorse, would catch her by the neck and give her a resounding kiss, which perhaps puzzled Catherine no less than her sarcasm of a minute before.

Moreover Mrs. Elsmere felt ruefully from the first that her new daughter was decidedly deficient in the sense of humour.

‘I believe it’s that father of hers,’ she would say to herself crossly. ‘By what Robert tells me of him he must have been one of the people who get ill in their minds for want of a good mouth-filling laugh now and then. The man who can’t amuse himself a bit out of the world is sure to get his head addled somehow, poor creature.’

Certainly it needed a faculty of laughter to be always able to take Mrs. Elsmere on the right side. For instance, Catherine was more often scandalised than impressed by her mother-in-law’s charitable performances.

Mrs. Elsmere’s little cottage was filled with work-house orphans sent to her from different London districts. The training of these girls was the chief business

ROBERT ELSMERE

of her life, and a very odd training it was, conducted in the noisiest way and on the most familiar terms. It was undeniable that the girls generally did well, and they invariably adored Mrs. Elsmere, but Catherine did not much like to think about them. Their household teaching under Mrs. Elsmere and her old servant Martha — as great an original as herself — was so irregular, their religious training so extraordinary, the clothes in which they were allowed to disport themselves so scandalous to the sober taste of the rector's wife, that Catherine involuntarily regarded the little cottage on the hill as a spot of misrule in the general order of the parish. She would go in, say, at eleven o'clock in the morning, find her mother-in-law in bed, half-dressed, with all her handmaidens about her, giving her orders, reading her letters and the newspaper, cutting out her girls' frocks, instructing them in the fashions, or delivering little homilies on questions suggested by the news of the day to the more intelligent of them. The room, the whole house, would seem to Catherine in a detestable litter. If so, Mrs. Elsmere never apologised for it. On the contrary, as she saw Catherine sweep a mass of miscellaneous *débris* off a chair in search of a seat, the small bright eyes would twinkle with something that was certainly nearer amusement than shame.

And in a hundred other ways Mrs. Elsmere's relations with the poor of the parish often made Catherine miserable. She herself had the most angelic pity and tenderness for sorrows and sinners; but sin was sin to her, and when she saw Mrs. Elsmere more than half-attracted by the stronger vices, and in many cases

SURREY

more inclined to laugh with what was human in them than to weep over what was vile, Robert's wife would go away and wrestle with herself, that she might be betrayed into nothing harsh towards Robert's mother.

But fate allowed their differences, whether they were deep or shallow, no time to develop. A week of bitter cold at the beginning of January struck down Mrs. Elsmere, whose strange ways of living were more the result of certain long-standing delicacies of health than she had ever allowed any one to imagine. A few days of acute inflammation of the lungs, borne with a patience and heroism which showed the Irish character at its finest — a moment of agonised wrestling with that terror of death which had haunted the keen vivacious soul from its earliest consciousness, ending in a glow of spiritual victory — and Robert found himself motherless. He and Catherine had never left her since the beginning of the illness. In one of the intervals towards the end, when there was a faint power of speech, she drew Catherine's cheek down to her and kissed her.

'God bless you!' the old woman's voice said, with a solemnity in it which Robert knew well, but which Catherine had never heard before. 'Be good to him, Catherine — be always good to him!'

And she lay looking from the husband to the wife with a certain wistfulness which pained Catherine, she knew not why. But she answered with tears and tender words, and at last the mother's face settled into a peace which death did but confirm.

This great and unexpected loss, which had shaken to their depths all the feelings and affections of his

ROBERT ELSMERE

youth, had thrown Elsmere more than ever on his wife. To him, made as it seemed for love and for enjoyment, grief was a novel and difficult burden. He felt with passionate gratitude that his wife helped him to bear it so that he came out from it not lessened but ennobled, that she preserved him from many a lapse of nervous weariness and irritation into which his temperament might easily have been betrayed.

And how his very dependence had endeared him to Catherine! That vibrating responsive quality in him, so easily mistaken for mere weakness, which made her so necessary to him — there is nothing perhaps which wins more deeply upon a woman. For all the while it was balanced in a hundred ways by the illimitable respect which his character and his doings compelled from those about him. To be the strength, the inmost joy of a man who within the conditions of his life seems to you a hero at every turn — there is no happiness more penetrating for a wife than this.

On this August afternoon the Elsmeres were expecting visitors. Catherine had sent the pony-carriage to the station to meet Rose and Langham, who was to escort her from Waterloo. For various reasons, all characteristic, it was Rose's first visit to Catherine's new home.

Now she had been for six weeks in London, and had been persuaded to come on to her sister, at the end of her stay. Catherine was looking forward to her coming with many tremors. The wild ambitious creature had been not one atom appeased by Manchester and its opportunities. She had gone back to Whindale in

SURREY

April only to fall into more hopeless discontent than ever. 'She can hardly be civil to anybody,' Agnes wrote to Catherine. 'The cry now is all "London" or at least "Berlin," and she cannot imagine why papa should ever have wished to condemn us to such a prison.'

Catherine grew pale with indignation as she read the words, and thought of her father's short-lived joy in the old house and its few green fields, or of the confidence which had soothed his last moments, that it would be well there with his wife and children, far from the hubbub of the world.

But Rose and her whims were not facts which could be put aside. They would have to be grappled with, probably humoured. As Catherine strolled out into the garden, listening alternately for Robert and for the carriage, she told herself that it would be a difficult visit. And the presence of Mr. Langham would certainly not diminish its difficulty. The mere thought of him set the wife's young form stiffening. A cold breath seemed to blow from Edward Langham, which chilled Catherine's whole being. Why was Robert so fond of him?

But the more Langham cut himself off from the world, the more Robert clung to him in his wistful affectionate way. The more difficult their intercourse became, the more determined the younger man seemed to be to maintain it. Catherine imagined that he often scourged himself in secret for the fact that the gratitude which had once flowed so readily had now become a matter of reflexion and resolution.

'Why should we always expect to get pleasure from

ROBERT ELSMERE

our friends?' he had said to her once with vehemence. 'It should be pleasure enough to love them.' And she knew very well of whom he was thinking.

How late he was this afternoon. He must have been a long round. She had news for him of great interest. The lodge-keeper from the Hall had just looked in to tell the rector that the squire and his widowed sister were expected home in four days.

But, interesting as the news was, Catherine's looks as she pondered it were certainly not looks of pleased expectation. Neither of them, indeed, had much cause to rejoice in the squire's advent. Since their arrival in the parish the splendid Jacobean Hall had been untenanted. The squire, who was abroad with his sister at the time of their coming, had sent a civil note to the new rector on his settlement in the parish, naming some common Oxford acquaintances, and desiring him to make what use of the famous Murewell Library he pleased. 'I hear of you as a friend to letters,' he wrote; 'do my books a service by using them.' The words were graceful enough. Robert had answered them warmly. He had also availed himself largely of the permission they had conveyed. We shall see presently that the squire, though absent, had already made a deep impression on the young man's imagination.

But unfortunately he came across the squire in two capacities. Mr. Wendover was not only the owner of Murewell, he was also the owner of the whole land of the parish, where, however, by a curious accident of inheritance, dating some generations back, and implying some very remote connexion between the Wend-

SURREY

over and Elsmere families, he was not the patron of the living. Now the more Elsmere studied him under this aspect, the deeper became his dismay. The estate was entirely in the hands of an agent who had managed it for some fifteen years, and of whose character the rector, before he had been two months in the parish, had formed the very poorest opinion. Robert, entering upon his duties with the ardour of the modern reformer, armed not only with charity but with science, found himself confronted by the opposition of a man who combined the shrewdness of an attorney with the callousness of a drunkard. It seemed incredible that a great landowner should commit his interests and the interests of hundreds of human beings to the hands of such a person.

By and by, however, as the rector penetrated more deeply into the situation, he found his indignation transferring itself more and more from the man to the master. It became clear to him that in some respects Henslowe suited the squire admirably. It became also clear to him that the squire had taken pains for years to let it be known that he cared not one rap for any human being on his estate in any other capacity than as a rent-payer or wage-receiver. What! Live for thirty years in that great house, and never care whether your tenants and labourers lived like pigs or like men, whether the old people died of damp, or the children of diphtheria, which you might have prevented! Robert's brow grew dark over it.

The click of an opening gate. Catherine shook off her dreaminess at once, and hurried along the path to meet her husband. In another moment Elsmere came

ROBERT ELSMERE

in sight, swinging along, a holly stick in his hand, his face aglow with health and exercise, and kindling at the sight of his wife. She hung on his arm, and, with his hand laid tenderly on hers, he asked her how she fared. She answered briefly, but with a little flush, her eyes raised to his. She was within a few weeks of motherhood.

Then they strolled along talking. He gave her an account of his afternoon, which, to judge from the worried expression which presently effaced the joy of their meeting, had been spent in some unsuccessful effort or other. They paused after a while, and stood looking over the plain before them to a spot beyond the nearer belt of woodland, where from a little hollow about three miles off there rose a cloud of bluish smoke.

‘He will do nothing!’ cried Catherine, incredulous.

‘Nothing! It is the policy of the estate, apparently, to let the old and bad cottages fall to pieces. He sneers at one for supposing any landowner has money for “philanthropy” just now. If the people don’t like the houses they can go. I told him I should appeal to the squire as soon as he came home.’

‘What did he say?’

‘He smiled, as much as to say, “Do as you like, and be a fool for your pains.” How the squire can let that man tyrannise over the estate as he does, I cannot conceive. Oh, Catherine, I am full of qualms about the squire!’

‘So am I,’ she said, with a little darkening of her clear look. ‘Old Benham has just been in to say they are expected on Thursday.’

Robert started. ‘Are these our last days of peace?’

SURREY

he said wistfully — ‘the last days of our honeymoon, Catherine?’

She smiled at him with a little quiver of passionate feeling under the smile.

‘Can anything touch that?’ she said under her breath.

‘Do you know,’ he said presently, his voice dropping, ‘that it is only a month to our wedding-day? Oh, my wife, have I kept my promise — is the new life as rich as the old?’

She made no answer, except the dumb sweet answer that love writes on eyes and lips. Then a tremor passed over her.

‘Are we too happy? Can it be well — be right?’

‘Oh, let us take it like children!’ he cried, with a shiver, almost petulantly. ‘There will be dark hours enough. It is so good to be happy.’

She leant her cheek fondly against his shoulder. To her life always meant self-restraint, self-repression, self-deadening, if need be. The Puritan distrust of personal joy as something dangerous and ensnaring was deep ingrained in her. It had no natural hold on him.

They stood a moment hand in hand fronting the cornfield and the sun-filled west, while the afternoon breeze blew back the man’s curly reddish hair, long since restored to all its natural abundance.

Presently Robert broke into a broad smile.

‘What do you suppose Langham has been entertaining Rose with on the way, Catherine? I would n’t miss her remarks to-night on the escort we provided her for a good deal.’

ROBERT ELSMERE

Catherine said nothing, but her delicate eyebrows went up a little. Robert stooped and lightly kissed her.

‘You never performed a greater act of virtue even in *your* life, Mrs. Elsmere, than when you wrote Langham that nice letter of invitation.’

And then the young rector sighed, as many a boyish memory came crowding upon him.

A sound of wheels! Robert’s long legs took him to the gate in a twinkling, and he flung it open just as Rose drove up in fine style, a thin dark man beside her.

Rose lent her bright cheek to Catherine’s kiss, and the two sisters walked up to the door together, while Robert and Langham loitered after them talking.

‘Oh, Catherine!’ said Rose under her breath, as they got into the drawing-room, with a little theatrical gesture, ‘why on earth did you inflict that man and me on each other for two mortal hours?’

‘Sh-sh!’ said Catherine’s lips, while her face gleamed with laughter.

Rose sank flushed upon a chair, her eyes glancing up with a little furtive anger in them as the two gentlemen entered the room.

‘You found each other easily at Waterloo?’ asked Robert.

‘Mr. Langham would never have found *me*,’ said Rose drily; ‘but I pounced on him at last — just, I believe, as he was beginning to cherish the hope of an empty carriage and the solitary enjoyment of his *Saturday Review*.’

Langham smiled nervously. ‘Miss Leyburn is too hard on a blind man,’ he said, holding up his eye-glass

apologetically; 'it was my eyes, not my will, that were at fault.'

Rose's lip curled a little. 'And Robert,' she cried, bending forward as though something had just occurred to her, 'do tell me — I vowed I would ask — *is* Mr. Langham a Liberal or a Conservative? *He* does n't know!'

Robert laughed, so did Langham.

'Your sister,' he said, flushing, 'will have one so very precise in all one says.'

He turned his handsome olive face towards her, an unwonted spark of animation lighting up his black eyes. It was evident that he felt himself persecuted, but it was not so evident whether he enjoyed the process or disliked it.

'Oh dear, no!' said Rose nonchalantly. 'Only I have just come from a house where everybody either loathes Mr. Gladstone or would die for him to-morrow. There was a girl of seven and a boy of nine who were always discussing "Coercion" in the corners of the schoolroom. So, of course, I have grown political too, and began to catechise Mr. Langham at once, and when he said "he did n't know," I felt I should like to set those children at him! They would soon put some principles into him!'

'It is not generally lack of principle, Miss Rose,' said her brother-in-law, 'that turns a man a doubter in politics, but too much!'

And while he spoke, his eyes resting on Langham, his smile broadened as he recalled all those instances in their Oxford past, when he had taken a humble share in one of the herculean efforts on the part of

ROBERT ELSMERE

Langham's friends, which were always necessary whenever it was a question of screwing a vote out of him on any debated University question.

'How dull it must be to have too much principle!' cried Rose. 'Like a mill choked with corn. No bread because the machine can't work!'

'Defend me from my friends!' cried Langham, roused. 'Elsmere, when did I give you a right to caricature me in this way? If I were interested,' he added, subsiding into his usual hesitating ineffectiveness, 'I suppose I should know my own mind.'

And then, seizing the muffins, he stood presenting them to Rose as though in deprecation of any further personalities. Inside him there was a hot protest against an unreasonable young beauty whom he had done his miserable best to entertain for two long hours, and who in return had made him feel himself more of a fool than he had done for years. Since when had young women put on all these airs? In his young days they knew their place.

Catherine meanwhile sat watching her sister. The child was more beautiful than ever, but in other outer respects the Rose of Long Whindale had undergone much transformation. The puffed sleeves, the æsthetic skirts, the naïve adornments of bead and shell, the formless hat, which it pleased her to imagine 'after Gainsborough,' had all disappeared. She was clad in some soft fawn-coloured garment, cut very much in the fashion; her hair was closely rolled and twisted about her lightly-balanced head; everything about her was neat and fresh and tight-fitting. A year ago she had been a damsel from the 'Earthly Paradise'; now, so

SURREY

far as an English girl can achieve it, she might have been a model for Tissot. In this phase, as in the other, there was a touch of extravagance. The girl was developing fast, but had clearly not yet developed. The restlessness, the self-consciousness of Long Whindale were still there; but they spoke to the spectator in different ways.

But in her anxious study of her sister Catherine did not forget her place of hostess. 'Did our man bring you through the park, Mr. Langham?' she asked him timidly.

'Yes. What an exquisite old house!' he said, turning to her, and feeling through all his critical sense the difference between the gentle matronly dignity of the one sister and the young self-assertion of the other.

'Ah,' said Robert, 'I kept that as a surprise! Did you ever see a more perfect place?'

'What date?'

'Early Tudor — as to the oldest part. It was built by a relation of Bishop Fisher's; then largely rebuilt under James I. Elizabeth stayed there twice. There is a trace of a visit of Sidney's. Waller was there, and left a copy of verses in the library. Evelyn laid out a great deal of the garden. Lord Clarendon wrote part of his History in the garden, et cetera, et cetera. The place is steeped in associations, and as beautiful as a dream to begin with.'

'And the owner of all this is the author of "The Idols of the Market-place"?''

Robert nodded.

'Did you ever meet him at Oxford? I believe he was

ROBERT ELSMERE

there once or twice during my time, but I never saw him.'

'Yes,' said Langham, thinking. 'I met him at dinner at the Vice-Chancellor's, now I remember. A bizarre and formidable person — very difficult to talk to,' he added reflectively.

Then as he looked up he caught a sarcastic twitch of Rose Leyburn's lip and understood it in a moment. Incontinently he forgot the squire and fell to asking himself what had possessed him on that luckless journey down. He had never seemed to himself more perverse, more unmanageable; and for once his philosophy did not enable him to swallow the certainty that this slim flashing creature must have thought him a morbid idiot, with as much *sangfroid* as usual.

Robert interrupted his reflexions by some Oxford question, and presently Catherine carried off Rose to her room. On their way they passed a door, beside which Catherine paused hesitating, and then with a bright flush on the face, which had such maternal calm in it already, she threw her arm round Rose and drew her in. It was a white empty room, smelling of the roses outside, and waiting in the evening stillness for the life that was to be. Rose looked at it all — at the piles of tiny garments, the cradle, the pictures from Retsch's 'Song of the Bell,' which had been the companions of their own childhood, on the walls — and something stirred in the girl's breast.

'Catherine, I believe you have everything you want, or you soon will have!' she cried, almost with a kind of bitterness, laying her hands on her sister's shoulders.

"I am very much obliged to you," said Catherine, smiling, "and I am sure you will be very kind to let me know when you can come." "I will do so," said she, "and I will be very glad to see you."

"I am very much obliged to you," said she, "and I am sure you will be very kind to let me know when you can come." "I will do so," said she, "and I will be very glad to see you."

"I am very much obliged to you," said she, "and I am sure you will be very kind to let me know when you can come." "I will do so," said she, "and I will be very glad to see you."

"I am very much obliged to you," said she, "and I am sure you will be very kind to let me know when you can come." "I will do so," said she, "and I will be very glad to see you."

"I am very much obliged to you," said she, "and I am sure you will be very kind to let me know when you can come." "I will do so," said she, "and I will be very glad to see you."

"I am very much obliged to you," said she, "and I am sure you will be very kind to let me know when you can come." "I will do so," said she, "and I will be very glad to see you."

"I am very much obliged to you," said she, "and I am sure you will be very kind to let me know when you can come." "I will do so," said she, "and I will be very glad to see you."

"I am very much obliged to you," said she, "and I am sure you will be very kind to let me know when you can come." "I will do so," said she, "and I will be very glad to see you."

"I am very much obliged to you," said she, "and I am sure you will be very kind to let me know when you can come." "I will do so," said she, "and I will be very glad to see you."

"I am very much obliged to you," said she, "and I am sure you will be very kind to let me know when you can come." "I will do so," said she, "and I will be very glad to see you."

ROBERT ELSMERE

downstairs did not seem to justify dispatch. She lingered and thought of 'Lohengrin and Albani,' of the crowd of artistic friends that had escorted her to Waterloo, of the way in which she had been applauded the night before, of the joys of playing Brahms with a long-haired pupil of Rubinstein's, who had dropped on one knee and kissed her hand at the end of it, etc. During the last six weeks the colours of 'this threadbare world' had been freshening before her in marvellous fashion. And now, as she stood looking out, the quiet fields opposite, the sight of a cow pushing its head through the hedge, the infinite sunset sky, the quiet of the house, filled her with a sudden depression. How dull it all seemed — how wanting in the glow of life!

CHAPTER XII

MEANWHILE downstairs a curious little scene was passing, watched by Langham, who, in his usual anti-social way, had retreated into a corner of his own as soon as another visitor appeared. Beside Catherine sat a Ritualist clergyman in cassock and long cloak — a saint clearly, though perhaps, to judge from the slight restlessness of movement that seemed to quiver through him perpetually, an irritable one. But he had the saint's wasted unearthly look, the ascetic brow, high and narrow, the veins showing through the skin, and a personality as magnetic as it was strong.

Catherine listened to the newcomer, and gave him his tea, with an aloofness of manner which was not lost on Langham. 'She is the Thirty-nine Articles in the flesh!' he said to himself. 'For her there must neither be too much nor too little. How can Elsmere stand it?'

Elsmere apparently was not perfectly happy. He sat balancing his long person over the arm of a chair listening to the recital of some of the High Churchman's parish troubles with a slight half-embarrassed smile. The vicar of Mottringham was always in trouble. The narrative he was pouring out took shape in Langham's sarcastic sense as a sort of classical epic, with the High Churchman, as a new champion of Christendom, harassed on all sides by pagan parishioners, crass church-wardens, and treacherous bishops. Catherine's fine face grew more and more set, nay, dis-

ROBERT ELSMERE

dainful. Mr. Newcome was quite blind to it. Women never entered into his calculations except as sisters or as penitents. At a certain diocesan conference he had discovered a sympathetic fibre in the young rector of Murewell, which had been to the imperious persecuted zealot like water to the thirsty. He had come to-day, drawn by the same quality in Elsmere as had originally attracted Langham to the St. Anselm's undergraduate, and he sat pouring himself out with as much freedom as if all his companions had been as ready as he was to die for an alb, or to spend half their days in piously circumventing a bishop.

But presently the conversation had slid, no one knew how, from Mottringham and its intrigues to London and its teeming East. Robert was leading, his eye now on the apostolic-looking priest, now on his wife. Mr. Newcome resisted, but Robert had his way. Then it came out that behind these battles of kites and crows at Mottringham, there lay an heroic period, when the pale ascetic had wrestled ten years with London poverty, leaving health and youth and nerves behind him in the *mêlée*. Robert dragged it out at last, that struggle, into open view, but with difficulty. The Ritualist may glory in the discomfiture of an Erastian bishop — what Christian dare parade ten years of love to God and man? And presently round Elsmere's lip there dawned a little smile of triumph. Catherine had shaken off her cold silence, her Puritan aloofness, was bending forward eagerly — listening. Stroke by stroke, as the words and facts were beguiled from him, all that was futile and quarrelsome in the sharp-featured priest sank out of sight ;

SURREY

the face glowed with inward light; the stature of the man seemed to rise; the angel in him unsheathed its wings. Suddenly a story of the slums that Mr. Newcome was telling — a story of the purest Christian heroism told in the simplest way — came to an end, and Catherine leaned towards him with a long quivering breath.

‘Oh, thank you, thank you! That must have been a joy, a privilege!’

Mr. Newcome turned and looked at her with surprise.

‘Yes, it was a privilege,’ he said slowly — the story had been an account of the rescue of a young country lad from a London den of thieves and profligates — ‘you are right; it was just that.’

And then some sensitive inner fibre of the man was set vibrating, and he would talk no more of himself or his past, do what they would.

So Robert had hastily to provide another subject, and he fell upon that of the squire.

Mr. Newcome’s eyes flashed.

‘He is coming back? I am sorry for you, Elsmere. “Woe is me that I am constrained to dwell with Mesech, and to have my habitation among the tents of Kedar!”’

And he fell back in his chair, his lips tightening, his thin long hand lying along the arm of it, answering to that general impression of combat, of the spiritual athlete, that hung about him.

‘I don’t know,’ said Robert brightly, as he leant against the mantelpiece looking curiously at his visitor. ‘The squire is a man of strong character, of vast learn-

ROBERT ELSMERE

ing. His library is one of the finest in England, and it is at my service. I am not concerned with his opinions.'

'Ah, I see,' said Newcome, in his dryest voice, but sadly. 'You are one of the people who believe in what you call tolerance — I remember.'

'Yes, that is an impeachment to which I plead guilty,' said Robert, perhaps with equal dryness; 'and you — have your worries driven you to throw tolerance overboard?'

Newcome bent forward quickly. Strange glow and intensity of the fanatical eyes — strange beauty of the wasted persecuting lips!

'Tolerance!' he said with irritable vehemence — 'tolerance! Simply another name for betrayal, cowardice, desertion — nothing else. God, Heaven, Salvation on the one side, the Devil and Hell on the other — and one miserable life, one wretched sin-stained will, to win the battle with; and in such a state of things *you*' — he dropped his voice, throwing out every word with a scornful, sibilant emphasis — '*you* would have us behave as though our friends were our enemies and our enemies our friends, as though eternal misery were a bagatelle and our faith a mere alternative. *I stand for Christ*, and His foes are mine.'

'By which I suppose you mean,' said Robert quietly, 'that you would shut your door on the writer of "*The Idols of the Market-place*"?''

'Certainly.'

And the priest rose, his whole attention concentrated on Robert, as though some deeper-lying motive

SURREY

were suddenly brought into play than any suggested by the conversation itself.

‘Certainly. *Judge not* — so long as a man has not judged himself — only till then. As to an open enemy, the Christian’s path is clear. We are but soldiers under orders. What business have we to be truce-making on our own account? The war is not ours, but God’s!’

Robert’s eyes had kindled. He was about to indulge himself in such a quick passage of arms as all such natures as his delight in, when his look travelled past the gaunt figure of the Ritualist vicar to his wife. A sudden pang smote, silenced him. She was sitting with her face raised to Newcome; and her beautiful grey eyes were full of a secret passion of sympathy. It was like the sudden re-emergence of something repressed, the satisfaction of something hungry. Robert moved closer to her, and the colour flushed over all his young boyish face.

‘To me,’ he said in a low voice, his eyes fixed rather on her than on Newcome, ‘a clergyman has enough to do with those foes of Christ he cannot choose but recognise. There is no making truce with vice or cruelty. Why should we complicate our task and spend in needless struggle the energies we might give to love and to our brother?’

His wife turned to him. There was trouble in her look, then a swift lovely dawn of something indescribable. Newcome moved away with a gesture that was half bitterness, half weariness.

‘Wait, my friend,’ he said slowly, ‘till you have watched that man’s books eating the very heart out of a poor creature as I have. When you have once seen

ROBERT ELSMERE

Christ robbed of a soul that might have been His, by the infidel of genius, you will loathe all this Laodicean cant of tolerance as I do!’

There was an awkward pause. Langham, with his eye-glass on, was carefully examining the make of a carved paper-knife lying near him. The strained pre-occupied mind of the High Churchman had never taken the smallest account of his presence, of which Robert had been keenly, not to say humorously, conscious throughout.

But after a minute or so the tutor got up, strolled forward, and addressed Robert on some Oxford topic of common interest. Newcome, in a kind of dream which seemed to have suddenly descended on him, stood near them, his priestly cloak falling in long folds about him, his ascetic face grave and rapt. Gradually, however, the talk of the two men dissipated the mystical cloud about him. He began to listen, to catch the savour of Langham’s modes of speech, and of his languid indifferent personality.

‘I must go,’ he said abruptly, after a minute or two, breaking in upon the friends’ conversation. ‘I shall hardly get home before dark.’

He took a cold punctilious leave of Catherine, and a still colder and slighter leave of Langham. Elsmere accompanied him to the gate.

On the way the older man suddenly caught him by the arm.

‘Elsmere, let me — I am the elder by so many years — let me speak to you. My heart goes out to you!’

And the eagle face softened; the harsh commanding presence became enveloping, magnetic. Robert paused

SURREY

and looked down upon him, a quick light of foresight in his eye. He felt what was coming.

And down it swept upon him, a hurricane of words hot from Newcome's inmost being, a protest winged by the gathered passion of years against certain 'dangerous tendencies' the elder priest discerned in the younger, against the worship of intellect and science as such which appeared in Elsmere's talk, in Elsmere's choice of friends. It was the eternal cry of the mystic of all ages.

'Scholarship! learning!' Eyes and lips flashed into a vehement scorn. 'You allow them a value in themselves, apart from the Christian's test. It is the modern canker, the modern curse! Thank God, my years in London burnt it out of me! Oh, my friend, what have you and I to do with all these curious triflings, which lead men oftener to rebellion than to worship? Is this a time for wholesale trust, for a maudlin universal sympathy? Nay, rather a day of suspicion, a day of repression! — a time for trampling on the lusts of the mind no less than the lusts of the body, a time when it is better to believe than to know, to pray than to understand!'

Robert was silent a moment, and they stood together, Newcome's gaze of fiery appeal fixed upon him.

'We are differently made, you and I,' said the young rector at last with difficulty. 'Where you see temptation I see opportunity. I cannot conceive of God as the Arch-plotter against His own creation!'

Newcome dropped his hold abruptly.

'A groundless optimism,' he said with harshness. 'On the track of the soul from birth to death there are

ROBERT ELSMERE

two sleuth-hounds — Sin and Satan. Mankind for ever flies them, is for ever vanquished and devoured. I see life always as a threadlike path between abysses along which man *creeps*' — and his gesture illustrated the words — 'with bleeding hands and feet towards one — narrow — solitary outlet. Woe to him if he turn to the right hand or the left — "I will repay, saith the Lord!"'

Elsmere drew himself up suddenly; the words seemed to him a blasphemy. Then something stayed the vehement answer on his lips. It was a sense of profound intolerable pity. What a maimed life! what an indomitable soul! Husbandhood, fatherhood, and all the sacred education that flows from human joy for ever self-forbidden, and this grim creed for recompense!

He caught Newcome's hand with a kind of filial eagerness.

'You are a perpetual lesson to me,' he said, most gently. 'When the world is too much with me, I think of you and am rebuked. God bless you! But I know myself. If I could see life and God as you see them for one hour, I should cease to be a Christian in the next!'

A flush of something like sombre resentment passed over Newcome's face. There is a tyrannical element in all fanaticism, an element which makes opposition a torment. He turned abruptly away, and Robert was left alone.

It was a still clear evening, rich in the languid softness and balm which mark the first approaches of autumn. Elsmere walked back to the house, his head

SURREY

uplifted to the sky which lay beyond the cornfield, his whole being wrought into a passionate protest — a passionate invocation of all things beautiful and strong and free, a clinging to life and Nature as to something wronged and outraged.

Suddenly his wife stood beside him. She had come down to warn him that it was late and that Langham had gone to dress; but she stood lingering by his side after her message was given, and he made no movement to go in. He turned to her, the exaltation gradually dying out of his face, and at last he stooped and kissed her with a kind of timidity unlike him. She clasped both hands on his arm and stood pressing towards him as though to make amends — for she knew not what. Something — some sharp momentary sense of difference, of antagonism, had hurt that inmost fibre which is the conscience of true passion. She did the most generous, the most ample penance for it as she stood there talking to him of half-indifferent things, but with a magic, a significance of eye and voice which seemed to take all the severity from her beauty and make her womanhood itself.

At the evening meal Rose appeared in pale blue, and it seemed to Langham, fresh from the absolute seclusion of college rooms in vacation, that everything looked flat and stale beside her, beside the flash of her white arms, the gleam of her hair, the confident grace of every movement. He thought her much too self-conscious and self-satisfied; and she certainly did not make herself agreeable to him; but for all that he could hardly take his eyes off her; and it occurred to

ROBERT ELSMERE

him once or twice to envy Robert the easy childish friendliness she showed to him, and to him alone of the party. The lack of real sympathy between her and Catherine was evident to the stranger at once — what, indeed, could the two have in common? He saw that Catherine was constantly on the point of blaming, and Rose constantly on the point of rebelling. He caught the wrinkling of Catherine's brow as Rose presently, in emulation apparently of some acquaintances she had been making in London, let slip the names of some of her male friends without the 'Mr.,' or launched into some bolder affectation than usual of a comprehensive knowledge of London society. The girl, in spite of all her beauty, and her fashion, and the little studied details of her dress, was in reality so crude, so much of a child under it all, that it made her audacities and assumptions the more absurd, and he could see that Robert was vastly amused by them.

But Langham was not merely amused by her. She was too beautiful and too full of character.

It astonished him to find himself afterwards edging over to the corner where she sat with the rectory cat on her knee — an inferior animal, but the best substitute for Chattie available. So it was, however; and once in her neighbourhood he made another serious effort to get her to talk to him. The Elsmeres had never seen him so conversational. He dropped his paradoxical melancholy; he roared as gently as any sucking dove; and Robert, catching from the pessimist of St. Anselm's, as the evening went on, some hesitating commonplaces worthy of a bashful undergraduate on the subject of the boats and Commemoration, had

SURREY

to beat a hasty retreat, so greatly did the situation tickle his sense of humour.

But the tutor made his various ventures under a discouraging sense of failure. What a capricious ambiguous creature it was, how fearless, how disagreeably alive to all his own damaging peculiarities! Never had he been so piqued for years, and as he floundered about trying to find some common ground where he and she might be at ease, he was conscious throughout of her mocking indifferent eyes, which seemed to be saying to him all the time, 'You are not interesting — no, not a bit! You are tiresome, and I see through you, but I must talk to you, I suppose, *faute de mieux*.'

Long before the little party separated for the night Langham had given it up, and had betaken himself to Catherine, reminding himself with some sharpness that he had come down to study his friend's life, rather than the humours of a provoking girl. How still the summer night was round the isolated rectory; how fresh and spotless were all the appointments of the house; what a Quaker neatness and refinement everywhere! He drank in the scent of air and flowers with which the rooms were filled; for the first time his fastidious sense was pleasantly conscious of Catherine's grave beauty; and even the mystic ceremonies of family prayer had a certain charm for him, pagan as he was. How much dignity and persuasiveness it has still, he thought to himself, this commonplace country life of ours, on its best sides!

Half-past ten arrived. Rose just let him touch her hand; Catherine gave him a quiet good-night, with various hospitable wishes for his nocturnal comfort,

ROBERT ELSMERE

and the ladies withdrew. He saw Robert open the door for his wife, and catch her thin white fingers as she passed him with all the secrecy and passion of a lover.

Then they plunged into the study, he and Robert, and smoked their fill. The study was an astonishing medley. Books, natural history specimens, a half-written sermon, fishing-rods, cricket-bats, a huge medicine cupboard — all the main elements of Elsmere's new existence were represented there. In the drawing-room with his wife and his sister-in-law he had been as much of a boy as ever; here clearly he was a man, very much in earnest. What about? What did it all come to? Can the English country clergyman do much with his life and his energies? Langham approached the subject with his usual scepticism.

Robert for a while, however, did not help him to solve it. He fell at once to talking about the squire, as though it cleared his mind to talk out his difficulties even to so ineffective a counsellor as Langham. Langham, indeed, was but faintly interested in the squire's crimes as a landlord, but there was a certain interest to be got out of the struggle in Elsmere's mind between the attractiveness of the squire, as one of the most difficult and original personalities of English letters, and that moral condemnation of him as a man of possessions and ordinary human responsibilities with which the young reforming rector was clearly penetrated. So that, as long as he could smoke under it, he was content to let his companion describe to him Mr. Wendover's connexion with the property, his accession to it in middle life after a long residence in Germany, his

SURREY

ineffectual attempts to play the English country gentleman, and his subsequent complete withdrawal from the life about him.

‘You have no idea what a queer sort of existence he lives in that huge place,’ said Robert with energy. ‘He is not unpopular exactly with the poor down here. When they want to belabour anybody they lay on at the agent, Henslowe. On the whole, I have come to the conclusion the poor like a mystery. They never see him; when he is here the park is shut up; the common report is that he walks at night; and he lives alone in that enormous house with his books. The county folk have all quarrelled with him, or nearly. It pleases him to get a few of the humbler people about, clergy, professional men, and so on, to dine with him sometimes. And he often fills the Hall, I am told, with London people for a day or two. But otherwise he knows no one, and nobody knows him.’

‘But you say he has a widowed sister? How does she relish the kind of life?’

‘Oh, by all accounts,’ said the rector with a shrug, ‘she is as little like other people as himself. A queer elfish little creature, they say, as fond of solitude down here as the squire, and full of hobbies. In her youth she was about the Court. Then she married a canon of Warham, one of the popular preachers, I believe, of the day. There is a bright little cousin of hers, a certain Lady Helen Varley, who lives near here, and tells me stories of her. She must be the most whimsical little aristocrat imaginable. She liked her husband apparently, but she never got over leaving London and the fashionable world, and is as hungry now, after her

ROBERT ELSMERE

long fast, for titles and big-wigs, as though she were the purest parvenu. The squire of course makes mock of her, and she has no influence with him. However, there is something naïve in the stories they tell of her. I feel as if I might get on with *her*. But the squire!’

And the rector, having laid down his pipe, took to studying his boots with a certain dolefulness.

Langham, however, who always treated the subjects of conversation presented to him as an epicure treats foods, felt at this point that he had had enough of the Wendovers, and started something else.

‘So you physic bodies as well as minds?’ he said, pointing to the medicine cupboard.

‘I should think so!’ cried Robert, brightening at once. ‘Last winter I causticked all the diphtheritic throats in the place with my own hand. Our parish doctor is an infirm old noodle, and I just had to do it. And if the state of part of the parish remains what it is, it’s a pleasure I may promise myself most years. But it shan’t remain what it is.’

And the rector reached out his hand again for his pipe, and gave one or two energetic puffs to it as he surveyed his friend stretched before him in the depths of an armchair.

‘I will make myself a public nuisance, but the people shall have their drains!’

‘It seems to me,’ said Langham, musing, ‘that in my youth people talked about Ruskin; now they talk about drains.’

‘And quite right, too. Dirt and drains, Catherine says I have gone mad upon them. It’s all very well, but they are the foundations of a sound religion.’

SURREY

'Dirt, drains, and Darwin,' said Langham meditatively, taking up Darwin's 'Earthworms,' which lay on the study-table beside him, side by side with a volume of Grant Allen's 'Sketches.' 'I did n't know you cared for this sort of thing!'

Robert did not answer for a moment, and a faint flush stole into his face. 'Imagine, Langham!' he said presently, 'I had never read even the "Origin of Species" before I came here. We used to take the thing half for granted, I remember, at Oxford, in a more or less modified sense. But to drive the mind through all the details of the evidence, to force one's self to understand the whole hypothesis and the grounds for it, is a very different matter. It is a revelation.'

'Yes,' said Langham; and could not forbear adding, 'but it is a revelation, my friend, that has not always been held to square with other revelations.'

In general these two kept carefully off the religious ground. The man who is religious by nature tends to keep his treasure hid from the man who is critical by nature, and Langham was much more interested in other things. But still it had always been understood that each was free to say what he would.

'There was a natural panic,' said Robert, throwing back his head at the challenge. 'Men shrank and will always shrink, say what you will, from what seems to touch things dearer to them than life. But the panic is passing. The smoke is clearing away, and we see that the battle-field is falling into new lines. But the old truth remains the same. Where and when and how you will, but somewhen and somehow, God created the heavens and the earth!'

ROBERT ELSMERE

Langham said nothing. It had seemed to him for long that the clergy were becoming dangerously ready to throw the Old Testament overboard, and all that it appeared to him to imply was that men's logical sense is easily benumbed where their hearts are concerned.

'Not that every one need be troubled with the new facts,' resumed Robert after a while, going back to his pipe. 'Why should they? We are not saved by Darwinism. I should never press them on my wife, for instance, with all her clearness and courage of mind.'

His voice altered as he mentioned his wife — grew extraordinarily soft, even reverential.

'It would distress her?' said Langham interrogatively, and inwardly conscious of pursuing investigations begun a year before.

'Yes, it would distress her. She holds the old ideas as she was taught them. It is all beautiful to her, what may seem doubtful or grotesque to others. And why should I or any one else trouble her? I above all, who am not fit to tie her shoestrings.'

The young husband's face seemed to gleam in the dim light which fell upon it. Langham involuntarily put up his hand in silence and touched his sleeve. Robert gave him a quiet friendly look, and the two men instantly plunged into some quite trivial and commonplace subject.

Langham entered his room that night with a renewed sense of pleasure in the country quiet, the peaceful flower-scented house. Catherine, who was an admirable housewife, had put out her best guest-sheets for his benefit, and the tutor, accustomed for long years to the second-best of college service, looked at

SURREY

their shining surfaces and frilled edges, at the freshly matted floor, at the flowers on the dressing-table, at the spotlessness of everything in the room, with a distinct sense that matrimony had its advantages. He had come down to visit the Elsmeres, sustained by a considerable sense of virtue. He still loved Elsmere and cared to see him. It was a much colder love, no doubt, than that which he had given to the undergraduate. But the man altogether was a colder creature, who for years had been drawing in tentacle after tentacle, and becoming more and more content to live without his kind. Robert's parsonage, however, and Robert's wife had no attractions for him; and it was with an effort that he had made up his mind to accept the invitation which Catherine had made an effort to write.

And, after all, the experience promised to be pleasant. His fastidious love for the quieter, subtler sorts of beauty was touched by the Elsmere surroundings. And whatever Miss Leyburn might be, she was not commonplace. The demon of convention had no large part in *her*! Langham lay awake for a time analysing his impressions of her with some gusto, and meditating, with a whimsical candour which seldom failed him, on the manner in which she had trampled on him, and the reasons why.

He woke up, however, in a totally different frame of mind. He was pre-eminently a person of moods, dependent, probably, as all moods are, on certain obscure physical variations. And his mental temperature had run down in the night. The house, the people who had been fresh and interesting to him twelve

ROBERT ELSMERE

hours before, were now the burden he had more than half-expected them to be. He lay and thought of the unbroken solitude of his college rooms, of S nancour's flight from human kind, of the uselessness of all friendship, the absurdity of all effort, and could hardly persuade himself to get up and face a futile world, which had, moreover, the enormous disadvantage for the moment of being a new one.

Convention, however, is master even of an Obermann. That prototype of all the disillusioned had to cut himself adrift from the society of the eagles on the Dent du Midi, to go and hang like any other ridiculous mortal on the Paris law-courts. Langham, whether he liked it or no, had to face the parsonic breakfast and the parsonic day.

He had just finished dressing when the sound of a girl's voice drew him to the window, which was open. In the garden stood Rose, on the edge of the sunk fence dividing the rectory domain from the cornfield. She was stooping forward playing with Robert's Dandie Dinmont. In one hand she held a mass of poppies, which showed a vivid scarlet against her blue dress; the other was stretched out seductively to the dog leaping round her. A crystal buckle flashed at her waist; the sunshine caught the curls of auburn hair, the pink cheek, the white moving hand, the lace ruffles at her throat and wrist. The lithe glittering figure stood thrown out against the heavy woods behind, the gold of the cornfield, the blues of the distance. All the gaiety and colour which is as truly representative of autumn as the grey languor of a September mist had passed into it.

SURREY

Langham stood and watched, hidden, as he thought, by the curtain, till a gust of wind shook the casement window beside him, and threatened to blow it in upon him. He put out his hand perforce to save it, and the slight noise caught Rose's ear. She looked up; her smile vanished. 'Go down, Dandie,' she said severely, and walked quickly into the house with as much dignity as nineteen is capable of.

At breakfast the Elsmeres found their guest a difficulty. But they also, as we know, had expected it. He was languor itself; none of their conversational efforts succeeded; and Rose, studying him out of the corners of her eyes, felt that it would be of no use even to torment so strange and impenetrable a being. Why on earth should people come and visit their friends if they could not keep up even the ordinary decent pretences of society?

Robert had to go off to some clerical business afterwards, and Langham wandered out into the garden by himself. As he thought of his Greek texts and his untenanted Oxford rooms, he had the same sort of craving that an opium-eater has, cut off from his drugs. How was he to get through?

Presently he walked back into the study, secured an armful of volumes, and carried them out. True to himself in the smallest things, he could never in his life be content with the companionship of one book. To cut off the possibility of choice and change in anything whatever was repugnant to him.

He sat himself down under the shade of a great chestnut near the house, and an hour glided pleasantly away. As it happened, however, he did not open one of

ROBERT ELSMERE

the books he had brought with him. A thought had struck him as he sat down, and he went groping in his pockets in search of a yellow-covered *brochure*, which, when found, proved to be a new play by Dumas, just about to be produced by a French company in London. Langham, whose passion for the French theatre supplied him, as we know, with a great deal of life without the trouble of living, was going to see it, and always made a point of reading the piece beforehand.

The play turned upon a typical French situation, treated in a manner rather more French than usual. The reader shrugged his shoulders a good deal as he read on. 'Strange nation!' he muttered to himself after an act or two. 'How they do revel in mud!'

Presently, just as the fifth act was beginning to get hold of him with that force which, after all, only a French playwright is master of, he looked up and saw the two sisters coming round the corner of the house from the great kitchen garden, which stretched its grass paths and tangled flower-masses down the further slope of the hill. The transition was sharp from Dumas's heated atmosphere of passion and crime to the quiet English rectory, its rural surroundings, and the figures of the two Englishwomen advancing towards him.

Catherine was in a loose white dress with a black lace scarf draped about her head and form. Her look hardly suggested youth, and there was certainly no touch of age in it. Ripeness, maturity, serenity — these were the chief ideas which seemed to rise in the mind at sight of her.

'Are you amusing yourself, Mr. Langham?' she

SURREY

said, stopping beside him and retaining with slight imperceptible force Rose's hand, which threatened to slip away.

'Very much. I have been skimming through a play, which I hope to see next week, by way of preparation.'

Rose turned involuntarily. Not wishing to discuss 'Marianne' with either Catherine or her sister, Langham had just closed the book and was returning it to his pocket. But she had caught sight of it.

'You are reading "Marianne,"' she exclaimed, the slightest possible touch of wonder in her tone.

'Yes, it is "Marianne,"' said Langham, surprised in his turn. He had very old-fashioned notions about the limits of a girl's acquaintance with the world, knowing nothing, therefore, as may be supposed, about the modern young woman, and he was a trifle scandalised by Rose's accent of knowledge.

'I read it last week,' she said carelessly; 'and the Piersons' — turning to her sister — 'have promised to take me to see it next winter if Desforêts comes again, as every one expects.'

'Who wrote it?' asked Catherine innocently. The theatre not only gave her little pleasure, but wounded in her a hundred deep unconquerable instincts. But she had long ago given up in despair the hope of protesting against Rose's dramatic instincts with success.

'Dumas *filis*,' said Langham drily. He was distinctly a good deal astonished.

Rose looked at him, and something brought a sudden flame into her cheek.

'It is one of the best of his,' she said defiantly. 'I have read a good many others. Mrs. Pierson lent me

ROBERT ELSMERE

a volume. And when I was introduced to Madame Desforêts last week, she agreed with me that "Marianne" is nearly the best of all.'

All this, of course, with the delicate nose well in air.

'You were introduced to Madame Desforêts?' cried Langham, surprised this time quite out of discretion. Catherine looked at him with anxiety. The reputation of the black-eyed little French actress, who had been for a year or two the idol of the theatrical public of Paris and London, had reached even to her, and the tone of Langham's exclamation struck her painfully.

'I was,' said Rose proudly. 'Other people may think it a disgrace. I thought it an honour!'

Langham could not help smiling, the girl's naïveté was so evident. It was clear that, if she had read 'Marianne,' she had never understood it.

'Rose, you don't know!' exclaimed Catherine, turning to her sister with a sudden trouble in her eyes. 'I don't think Mrs. Pierson ought to have done that, without consulting mamma especially.'

'Why not?' cried Rose vehemently. Her face was burning, and her heart was full of something like hatred of Langham, but she tried hard to be calm. 'I think,' she said, with a desperate attempt at crushing dignity, 'that the way in which all sorts of stories are believed against a woman, just because she is an actress, is *disgraceful*! Just because a woman is on the stage, everybody thinks they may throw stones at her. I *know*, because — because she told me,' cried the speaker, growing, however, half-embarrassed as she spoke, 'that she feels the things that are said of her deeply! She has been ill, very ill, and one of her

SURREY

friends said to me, "You know it is n't her work, or a cold, or anything else that 's made her ill — it's calumny!" And so it is.'

The speaker flashed an angry glance at Langham. She was sitting on the arm of the cane chair into which Catherine had fallen, one hand grasping the back of the chair for support, one pointed foot beating the ground restlessly in front of her, her small full mouth pursed indignantly, the greenish-grey eyes flashing and brilliant.

As for Langham, the cynic within him was on the point of uncontrollable laughter. Madame Desforêts complaining of calumny to this little Westmoreland maiden! But his eyes involuntarily met Catherine's, and the expression of both fused into a common wonderment — amused on his side, anxious on hers. 'What a child, what an infant it is!' they seemed to confide to one another. Catherine laid her hand softly on Rose's, and was about to say something soothing, which might secure her an opening for some sisterly advice later on, when there was a sound of calling from the gate. She looked up and saw Robert waving to her. Evidently he had just run up from the school to deliver a message. She hurried across the drive to him and afterwards into the house, while he disappeared.

Rose got up from her perch on the armchair and would have followed, but a movement of obstinacy or Quixotic wrath, or both, detained her.

'At any rate, Mr. Langham,' she said, drawing herself up, and speaking with the most lofty accent, 'if you don't know anything personally about Madame

ROBERT ELSMERE

Desforêts, I think it would be much fairer to say nothing — and not to assume at once that all you hear is true!’

Langham had rarely felt more awkward than he did then, as he sat leaning forward under the tree, this slim indignant creature standing over him, and his consciousness about equally divided between a sense of her absurdity and a sense of her prettiness.

‘You are an advocate worth having, Miss Leyburn,’ he said at last, an enigmatical smile he could not restrain playing about his mouth. ‘I could not argue with you; I had better not try.’

Rose looked at him, at his dark regular face, at the black eyes which were much vivider than usual, perhaps because they could not help reflecting some of the irrepressible memories of Madame Desforêts and her *causes célèbres* which were coursing through the brain behind them, and with a momentary impression of rawness, defeat, and yet involuntary attraction, which galled her intolerably, she turned away and left him.

In the afternoon Robert was still unavailable, to his own great chagrin, and Langham summoned up all his resignation and walked with the ladies. The general impression left upon his mind by the performance was, first, that the dust of an English August is intolerable, and, secondly, that women’s society ought only to be ventured on by the men who are made for it. The views of Catherine and Rose may be deduced from his with tolerable certainty.

But in the late afternoon, when they thought they

SURREY

had done their duty by him, and he was again alone in the garden reading, he suddenly heard the sounds of music.

Who was playing, and in that way? He got up and strolled past the drawing-room window to find out.

Rose had got hold of an accompanist, the timid dowdy daughter of a local solicitor, with some capacity for reading, and was now, in her lavish impetuous fashion, rushing through a quantity of new music, the accumulations of her visit to London. She stood up beside the piano, her hair gleaming in the shadow of the drawing-room, her white brow hanging forward over her violin as she peered her way through the music, her whole soul absorbed in what she was doing. Langham passed unnoticed.

What astonishing playing! Why had no one warned him of the presence of such a gift in this dazzling, prickly, unripe creature? He sat down against the wall of the house, as close as possible, but out of sight, and listened. All the romance of his spoilt and solitary life had come to him so far through music, and through such music as this! For she was playing Wagner, Brahms, and Rubinstein, interpreting all those passionate voices of the subtlest moderns, through which the heart of our own day has expressed itself even more freely and exactly than through the voice of literature. Hans Sachs' immortal song, echoes from the love-duets in 'Tristan und Isolde,' fragments from a wild and alien dance-music, they rippled over him in a warm intoxicating stream of sound, stirring association after association, and rousing from sleep a hundred bygone moods of feeling.

ROBERT ELSMERE

What magic and mastery in the girl's touch! What power of divination, and of rendering! Ah! she too was floating in passion and romance, but of a different sort altogether from the conscious reflected product of the man's nature. She was not thinking of the past, but of the future; she was weaving her story that was to be into the flying notes, playing to the unknown of her Whindale dreams, the strong ardent unknown, — 'insufferable, if he pleases, to all the world besides, but to *me* heaven!' She had caught no breath yet of his coming, but her heart was ready for him.

Suddenly, as she put down her violin, the French window opened, and Langham stood before her. She looked at him with a quick stiffening of the face which a minute before had been all quivering and relaxed, and his instant perception of it chilled the impulse which had brought him there.

He said something *banal* about his enjoyment, something totally different from what he had meant to say. The moment presented itself, but he could not seize it or her.

'I had no notion you cared for music,' she said carelessly, as she shut the piano, and then she went away.

Langham felt a strange fierce pang of disappointment. What had he meant to do or say? Idiot! What common ground was there between him and any such exquisite youth? What girl would ever see in him anything but the dull remains of what once had been a man!

CHAPTER XIII

THE next day was Sunday. Langham, who was as depressed and homesick as ever, with a certain new spice of restlessness, not altogether intelligible to himself, thrown in, could only brace himself to the prospect by the determination to take the English rural Sunday as the subject of severe scientific investigation. He would 'do it' thoroughly.

So he donned a black coat and went to church with the rest. There, in spite of his boredom with the whole proceeding, Robert's old tutor was a good deal more interested by Robert's sermon than he had expected to be. It was on the character of David, and there was a note in it, a note of historical imagination, a power of sketching in a background of circumstance, and of biting into the mind of the listener, as it were, by a detail or an epithet, which struck Langham as something new in his experience of Elsmere. He followed it at first as one might watch a game of skill, enjoying the intellectual form of it, and counting the good points, but by the end he was not a little carried away. The peroration was undoubtedly very moving, very intimate, very modern, and Langham up to a certain point was extremely susceptible to oratory, as he was to music and acting. The critical judgement, however, at the root of him kept coolly repeating as he stood watching the people defile out of the church: 'This sort of thing will go down, will make a mark; Elsmere is at the beginning of a career!'

ROBERT ELSMERE

In the afternoon Robert, who was feeling deeply guilty towards his wife, in that he had been forced to leave so much of the entertainment of Langham to her, asked his old friend to come for him to the school at four o'clock and take him for a walk between two engagements. Langham was punctual, and Robert carried him off first to see the Sunday cricket, which was in full swing. During the past year the young rector had been developing a number of outdoor capacities which were probably always dormant in his Elsmere blood, the blood of generations of country gentlemen, but which had never had full opportunity before. He talked of fishing as Kingsley might have talked of it, and, indeed, with constant quotations from Kingsley; and his cricket, which had been good enough at Oxford to get him into his College eleven, had stood him in specially good stead with the Murewell villagers. That his play was not elegant they were not likely to find out; his bowling they set small store by; but his batting was of a fine, slashing, superior sort which soon carried the Murewell Club to a much higher position among the clubs of the neighbourhood than it had ever yet aspired to occupy.

The rector had no time to play on Sundays, however, and, after they had hung about the green a little while, he took his friend over to the Workmen's Institute, which stood at the edge of it. He explained that the Institute had been the last achievement of the agent before Henslowe, a man who had done his duty to the estate according to his lights, and to whom it was owing that those parts of it, at any rate, which were most in the public eye, were still in fair condition.

SURREY

The Institute was now in bad repair and too small for the place. 'But catch that man doing anything for us!' exclaimed Robert hotly. 'He will hardly mend the roof now, merely, I believe, to spite me. But come and see my new Naturalists' Club.'

And he opened the Institute door. Langham followed in the temper of one getting up a subject for examination.

Poor Robert! His labour and his enthusiasm deserved a more appreciative eye. He was wrapped up in his Club, which had been the great success of his first year, and he dragged Langham through it all, not indeed, sympathetic creature that he was, without occasional qualms. 'But after all,' he would say to himself indignantly, 'I must do *something* with him.'

Langham, indeed, behaved with resignation. He looked at the collections for the year, and was quite ready to take it for granted that they were extremely creditable. Into the old-fashioned window-sills glazed compartments had been fitted, and these were now fairly filled with specimens, with eggs, butterflies, moths, beetles, fossils, and what not. A case of stuffed tropical birds presented by Robert stood in the centre of the room; another containing the birds of the district was close by. On a table farther on stood two large open books, which served as records of observations on the part of members of the Club. In one, which was scrawled over with mysterious hieroglyphs, any one might write what he would. In the other, only such facts and remarks as had passed the gauntlet of a Club meeting were recorded in Robert's neatest hand. On the same table stood jars full of strange creatures

ROBERT ELSMERE

— tadpoles and water larvæ of all kinds, over which Robert hung now absorbed, poking among them with a straw, while Langham, to whom only the generalisations of science were congenial, stood by and mildly scoffed.

As they came out a great loutish boy, who had evidently been hanging about waiting for the rector, came up to him, boorishly touched his cap, and then, taking a cardboard box out of his pocket, opened it with infinite caution, something like a tremor of emotion passing over his gnarled countenance.

The rector's eyes glistened.

'Hullo! I say, Irwin, where in the name of fortune did you get that? You lucky fellow! Come in, and let 's look it out!'

And the two plunged back into the Club together, leaving Langham to the philosophic and patient contemplation of the village green, its geese, its donkeys, and its surrounding fringe of houses. He felt that quite indisputably life would have been better worth living if, like Robert, he could have taken a passionate interest in rare moths or common ploughboys; but Nature having denied him the possibility, there was small use in grumbling.

Presently the two naturalists came out again, and the boy went off, bearing his treasure with him.

'Lucky dog!' said Robert, turning his friend into a country road leading out of the village, 'he's found one of the rarest moths of the district. Such a hero he'll be in the Club to-morrow night. It's extraordinary what a rational interest has done for that fellow! I nearly fought him in public last winter.'

SURREY

And he turned to his friend with a laugh, and yet with a little quick look of feeling in the grey eyes.

‘Magnificent, but not war,’ said Langham drily. ‘I would n’t have given much for your chances against those shoulders.’

‘Oh, I don’t know. I should have had a little science on my side, which counts for a great deal. We turned him out of the Club for brutality towards the old grandmother he lives with — turned him out in public. Such a scene! I shall never forget the boy’s face. It was like a corpse, and the eyes burning out of it. He made for me, but the others closed up round, and we got him put out.’

‘Hard lines on the grandmother,’ remarked Langham.

‘She thought so — poor old thing! She left her cottage that night, thinking he would murder her, and went to a friend. At the end of a week he came into the friend’s house, where she was alone in bed. She cowered under the bedclothes, she told me, expecting him to strike her. Instead of which he threw his wages down beside her and gruffly invited her to come home. “He would n’t do her no mischief.” Everybody dissuaded her, but the plucky old thing went. A week or two afterwards she sent for me and I found her crying. She was sure the lad was ill, he spoke to nobody at his work. “Lord, sir!” she said, “it do remind me, when he sits glowering at nights, of those folks in the Bible, when the devils inside ’em kep’ a-tearing ’em. But he’s like a new-born babe to me, sir — never does me no ’arm. And it do go to my heart, sir, to see how poorly he do take his vittles!” So I made tracks for

ROBERT ELSMERE

that lad,' said Robert, his eyes kindling, his whole frame dilating. 'I found him in the fields one morning. I have seldom lived through so much in half an hour. In the evening I walked him up to the Club, and we re-admitted him, and since then the boy has been like one clothed and in his right mind. If there is any trouble in the Club I set him on, and he generally puts it right. And when I was laid up with a chill in the spring, and the poor fellow came trudging up every night after his work to ask for me — well, never mind; but it gives one a good glow at one's heart to think about it.'

The speaker threw back his head impulsively, as though defying his own feeling. Langham looked at him curiously. The pastoral temper was a novelty to him, and the strong development of it in the undergraduate of his Oxford recollections had its interest.

'A quarter to six,' said Robert, as on their return from their walk they were descending a low-wooded hill above the village, and the church clock rang out. 'I must hurry, or I shall be late for my story-telling.'

'Story-telling!' said Langham, with a half-exasperated shrug. 'What next? You clergy are too inventive by half!'

Robert laughed a trifle bitterly.

'I can't congratulate you on your epithets,' he said, thrusting his hands far into his pockets. 'Good heavens, if we *were* — if we were inventive as a body, the Church would n't be where she is in the rural districts! My story-telling is the simplest thing in the world. I began it in the winter with the object of somehow or other getting at the *imagination* of these rustics.

SURREY

Force them for only half an hour to live some one else's life — it is the one thing worth doing with them. That's what I have been aiming at. I *told* my stories all the winter — Shakespeare, Don Quixote, Dumas — Heaven knows what! And on the whole it answers best. But now we are reading "The Talisman." Come and inspect us, unless you're a purist about your Scott! None other of the immortals have such *longueurs* as he, and we cut him freely.'

'By all means,' said Langham; 'lead on.' And he followed his companion without repugnance. After all, there was something contagious in so much youth and hopefulness.

The story-telling was held in the Institute.

A group of men and boys were hanging round the door when they reached it. The two friends made their way through, greeted in the dumb friendly English fashion on all sides, and Langham found himself in a room half-filled with boys and youths, a few grown men, who had just put their pipes out, lounging at the back.

Langham not only endured, but enjoyed the first part of the hour that followed. Robert was an admirable reader, as most enthusiastic imaginative people are. He was a master of all those arts of look and gesture which make a spoken story telling and dramatic, and Langham marvelled with what energy, after his hard day's work, and with another service before him, he was able to throw himself into such a *hors d'œuvre* as this. He was reading to-night one of the most perfect scenes that even the Wizard of the North has ever conjured; the scene in the tent of Richard Lion-Heart,

ROBERT ELSMERE

when the disguised slave saves the life of the king, and Richard first suspects his identity. As he read on, his arms resting on the high desk in front of him, and his eyes, full of infectious enjoyment, travelling from the book to his audience, surrounded by human beings whose confidence he had won, and whose lives he was brightening from day to day, he seemed to Langham the very type and model of a man who had found his *métier*, found his niche in the world, and the best means of filling it. If to attain to an 'adequate and masterly expression of one's self' be the aim of life, Robert was fast achieving it. This parish of twelve hundred souls gave him now all the scope he asked. It was evident that he felt his work to be rather above than below his deserts. He was content — more than content — to spend ability which would have distinguished him in public life, or carried him far to the front in literature, on the civilising of a few hundred of England's rural poor. The future might bring him worldly success — Langham thought it must and would. Clergymen of Robert's stamp are rare among us. But if so, it would be in response to no conscious effort of his. Here, in the country living he had so long dreaded and put from him, lest it should tax his young energies too lightly, he was happy — deeply, abundantly happy, at peace with God, at one with man.

Happy! Langham, sitting at the outer corner of one of the benches, by the open door, gradually ceased to listen, started on other lines of thought by this realisation, warm, stimulating, provocative, of another man's happiness.

SURREY

Outside, the shadows lengthened across the green; groups of distant children or animals passed in and out of the golden light-spaces; the patches of heather left here and there glowed as the sunset touched them. Every now and then his eye travelled vaguely past a cottage garden, gay with the pinks and carmines of the phloxes, into the cool browns and bluish-greys of the raftered room beyond; babies toddled across the road, with stooping mothers in their train; the whole air and scene seemed to be suffused with suggestions of the pathetic expansiveness and helplessness of human existence, which, generation after generation, is still so vulnerable, so confiding, so eager. Life after life flowers out from the darkness and sinks back into it again. And in the interval what agony, what disillusion! All the apparatus of a universe that men may know what it is to hope and fail, to win and lose! *Happy!* — in this world, 'where men sit and hear each other groan.' His friend's confidence only made Langham as melancholy as Job.

What was it based on? In the first place, on Christianity — 'on the passionate acceptance of an exquisite fairy-tale,' said the dreaming spectator to himself, 'which at the first honest challenge of the critical sense withers in our grasp! That challenge Elsmere has never given it, and in all probability never will. No! A man sees none the straighter for having a wife he adores, and a profession that suits him, between him and unpleasant facts!'

In the evening Langham, with the usual reaction of his afternoon self against his morning self, felt that

ROBERT ELSMERE

wild horses should not take him to church again, and, with a longing for something purely mundane, he stayed at home with a volume of Montaigne, while apparently all the rest of the household went to evening service.

After a warm day the evening had turned cold and stormy; the west was streaked with jagged strips of angry cloud, the wind was rising in the trees, and the temperature had suddenly fallen so much that when Langham shut himself up in Robert's study he did what he had been admonished to do in case of need, set a light to the fire, which blazed out merrily into the darkening room. Then he drew the curtains and threw himself down into Robert's chair with a sigh of Sybaritic satisfaction. 'Good! Now for something that takes the world less naïvely,' he said to himself; 'this house is too virtuous for anything.'

He opened his Montaigne and read on very happily for half an hour. The house seemed entirely deserted.

'All the servants gone too!' he said presently, looking up and listening. 'Anybody who wants the spoons need n't trouble about me. I don't leave this fire.'

And he plunged back again into his book. At last there was a sound of the swing-door which separated Robert's passage from the front hall opening and shutting. Steps came quickly towards the study, the handle was turned, and there on the threshold stood Rose.

He turned quickly round in his chair with a look of astonishment. She also started as she saw him.

'I did not know any one was in,' she said awk-

SURREY

wardly, the colour spreading over her face. 'I came to look for a book.'

She made a delicious picture as she stood framed in the darkness of the doorway, her long dress caught up round her in one hand, the other resting on the handle. A gust of some delicate perfume seemed to enter the room with her, and a thrill of pleasure passed through Langham's senses.

'Can I find anything for you?' he said, springing up.

She hesitated a moment, then apparently made up her mind that it would be foolish to retreat, and, coming forward, she said, with an accent as coldly polite as she could make it, —

'Pray don't disturb yourself. I know exactly where to find it.'

She went up to the shelves where Robert kept his novels, and began running her fingers over the books, with slightly knitted brows and a mouth severely shut. Langham, still standing, watched her and presently stepped forward.

'You can't reach those upper shelves,' he said; 'please let me.'

He was already beside her, and she gave way.

'I want "Charles Auchester,"' she said, still forbiddingly. 'It ought to be there.'

'Oh, that queer musical novel — I know it quite well. No sign of it here,' and he ran over the shelves with the practised eye of one accustomed to deal with books.

'Robert must have lent it,' said Rose, with a little sigh. 'Never mind, please. It does n't matter,' and she was already moving away.

ROBERT ELSMERE

‘Try some other instead,’ he said, smiling, his arm still upstretched. ‘Robert has no lack of choice.’ His manner had an animation and ease usually quite foreign to it. Rose stopped, and her lips relaxed a little.

‘He is very nearly as bad as the novel-reading bishop, who was reduced at last to stealing the servant’s *Family Herald* out of the kitchen cupboard,’ she said, a smile dawning.

Langham laughed.

‘Has he such an episcopal appetite for them? That accounts for the fact that when he and I begin to talk novels I am always nowhere.’

‘I should n’t have supposed you ever read them,’ said Rose, obeying an irresistible impulse, and biting her lip the moment afterwards.

‘Do you think that we poor people at Oxford are always condemned to works on the “enclitic δε”?’ he asked, his fine eyes lit up with gaiety, and his head, of which the Greek outlines were ordinarily so much disguised by his stoop and hesitating look, thrown back against the books behind him.

Natures like Langham’s, in which the nerves are never normal, have their moments of felicity, balancing their weeks of timidity and depression. After his melancholy of the last two days the tide of reaction had been mounting within him, and the sight of Rose had carried it to its height.

She gave a little involuntary stare of astonishment. What had happened to Robert’s silent and finicking friend?

‘I know nothing of Oxford,’ she said a little primly, in answer to his question. ‘I never was there — but I

SURREY

never was anywhere, I have seen nothing,' she added hastily, and, as Langham thought, bitterly.

'Except London, and the great world, and Madame Desforêts!' he answered, laughing. 'Is that so little?'

She flashed a quick defiant look at him, as he mentioned Madame Desforêts, but his look was imperceptibly kind and gay. She could not help softening towards him. What magic had passed over him?

'Do you know,' said Langham, moving, 'that you are standing in a draught, and that it has turned extremely cold?'

For she had left the passage-door wide open behind her, and as the window was partially open the curtains were swaying hither and thither, and her muslin dress was being blown in coils round her feet.

'So it has,' said Rose, shivering. 'I don't envy the church people. You have n't found me a book, Mr. Langham?'

'I will find you one in a minute, if you will come and read it by the fire,' he said, with his hand on the door.

She glanced at the fire and at him, irresolute. His breath quickened. She too had passed into another phase. Was it the natural effect of night, of solitude, of sex? At any rate, she sank softly into the armchair opposite to that in which he had been sitting.

'Find me an exciting one, please.'

Langham shut the door securely, and went back to the bookcase, his hand trembling a little as it passed along the books. He found 'Villette' and offered it to her. She took it, opened it, and appeared deep in it at once. He took the hint and went back to his Montaigne.

The fire crackled cheerfully, the wind outside made

every now and then a sudden gusty onslaught on their silence, dying away again as abruptly as it had risen. Rose turned the pages of her book, sitting a little stiffly in her long chair, and Langham gradually began to find Montaigne impossible to read. He became instead more and more alive to every detail of the situation into which he had fallen. At last seeing, or imagining, that the fire wanted attending to, he bent forward and thrust the poker into it. A burning coal fell on the hearth and Rose hastily withdrew her foot from the fender and looked up.

‘I am so sorry!’ he interjected. ‘Coals never do what you want them to do. Are you very much interested in “Villette”?’

‘Deeply,’ said Rose, letting the book, however, drop on her lap. She laid back her head with a little sigh, which she did her best to check, halfway through. What ailed her to-night? She seemed wearied; for the moment there was no fight in her with anybody. Her music, her beauty, her mutinous mocking gaiety — these things had all worked on the man beside her; but this new softness, this touch of childish fatigue, was adorable.

‘Charlotte Brontë wrote it out of her Brussels experience, did n’t she?’ she resumed languidly. ‘How sorry she must have been to come back to that dull home and that awful brother after such a break!’

‘There were reasons more than one that must have made her sorry to come back,’ said Langham reflectively. ‘But how she pined for her wilds all through! I am afraid you don’t find your wilds as interesting as she found hers?’

SURREY

His question and his smile startled her.

Her first impulse was to take up her book again, as a hint to him that her likings were no concern of his. But something checked it, probably the new brilliancy of that look of his, which had suddenly grown so personal, so manly. Instead, 'Villette' slid a little farther from her hand, and her pretty head still lay lightly back against the cushion.

'No, I don't find my wilds interesting at all,' she said forlornly.

'You are not fond of the people as your sister is?'

'Fond of them?' cried Rose hastily. 'I should think not; and what is more, they don't like me. It is quite intolerable since Catherine left. I have so much more to do with them. My other sister and I have to do all her work. It is dreadful to have to work after somebody who has a genius for doing just what you do worst.'

The young girl's hands fell across one another with a little impatient gesture. Langham had a movement of the most delightful compassion towards the petulant, childish creature. It was as though their relative positions had been in some mysterious way reversed. During their two days together she had been the superior, and he had felt himself at the mercy of her scornful sharp-eyed youth. Now, he knew not how or why, Fate seemed to have restored to him something of the man's natural advantage, combined, for once, with the impulse to use it.

'Your sister, I suppose, has been always happy in charity?' he said.

'Oh dear, yes,' said Rose irritably; 'anything that

ROBERT ELSMERE

has two legs and is ill, that is all Catherine wants to make her happy.'

'And *you* want something quite different, something more exciting?' he asked, his diplomatic tone showing that he felt he dared something in thus pressing her, but dared it at least with his wits about him. Rose met his look irresolutely, a little tremor of self-consciousness creeping over her.

'Yes, I want something different,' she said in a low voice and paused; then, raising herself energetically, she clasped her hands round her knees. 'But it is not idleness I want. I want to work, but at things I was born for; I *can't* have patience with old women, but I could slave all day and all night to play the violin.'

'You want to give yourself up to study then, and live with musicians?' he said quietly.

She shrugged her shoulders by way of answer, and began nervously to play with her rings.

That under-self which was the work and the heritage of her father in her, and which, beneath all the wilfulnesses and defiances of the other self, held its own moral debates in its own way, well out of Catherine's sight generally, began to emerge, wooed into the light by his friendly gentleness.

'But it is all so difficult, you see,' she said despairingly. 'Papa thought it wicked to care about anything except religion. If he had lived, of course I should never have been allowed to study music. It has been all mutiny so far, every bit of it, whatever I have been able to do.'

'He would have changed with the times,' said Langham.

SURREY

‘I know he would,’ cried Rose. ‘I have told Catherine so a hundred times. People — good people — think quite differently about art now, don’t they, Mr. Langham?’

She spoke with perfect naïveté. He saw more and more of the child in her, in spite of that one striking development of her art.

‘They call it the handmaid of religion,’ he answered, smiling.

Rose made a little face.

‘I should n’t,’ she said, with frank brevity. ‘But then there’s something else. You know where we live — at the very ends of the earth, seven miles from a station, in the very loneliest valley of all Westmoreland. What’s to be done with a fiddle in such a place? Of course, ever since papa died I’ve just been plotting and planning to get away. But there’s the difficulty,’ and she crossed one white finger over another as she laid out her case. ‘That house where we live has been lived in by Leyburns ever since — the Flood! Horrid set they were, I know, because I can’t ever make mamma or even Catherine talk about them. But still, when papa retired, he came back, and bought the old place from his brother. Such a dreadful, dreadful mistake!’ cried the child, letting her hands fall over her knee.

‘Had he been so happy there?’

‘Happy!’ — and Rose’s lip curled. ‘His brothers used to kick and cuff him, his father was awfully unkind to him, he never had a day’s peace till he went to school, and after he went to school he never came back for years and years and years, till Cath-

ROBERT ELSMERE

erine was fifteen. What *could* have made him so fond of it?’

And again looking despondently into the fire she pondered that far-off perversity of her father’s.

‘Blood has strange magnetisms,’ said Langham, seized as he spoke by the pensive prettiness of the bent head and neck, ‘and they show themselves in the oddest ways.’

‘Then I wish they would n’t,’ she said irritably. ‘But that is n’t all. He went there, not only because he loved that place, but because he hated other places. I think he must have thought’ — and her voice dropped — ‘he was n’t going to live long — he was n’t well when he gave up the school — and then we could grow up there safe, without any chance of getting into mischief. Catherine says he thought the world was getting very wicked and dangerous and irreligious, and that it comforted him to know that we should be out of it.’

Then she broke off suddenly.

‘Do you know,’ she went on wistfully, raising her beautiful eyes to her companion, ‘after all, he gave me my first violin.’

Langham smiled. °

‘I like that little inconsequence,’ he said.

‘Then of course I took to it, like a duck to water, and it began to scare him that I loved it so much. He and Catherine only loved religion, and us, and the poor. So he always took it away on Sundays. Then I hated Sundays, and would never be good on them. One Sunday I cried myself nearly into a fit on the dining-room floor because I might n’t have it. Then he came in,

SURREY

and he took me up, and he tied a Scotch plaid round his neck, and he put me into it, and carried me away right up on to the hills, and he talked to me like an angel. He asked me not to make him sad before God that he had given me that violin; so I never screamed again — on Sundays!’

Her companion’s eyes were not quite as clear as before.

‘Poor little naughty child,’ he said, bending over to her. ‘I think your father must have been a man to be loved.’

She looked at him, very near to weeping, her face all working with a soft remorse.

‘Oh, so he was — so he was! If he had been hard and ugly to us, why, it would have been much easier for *me*; but he was so good! And there was Catherine just like him, always preaching to us what he wished. You see what a chain it’s been — what a weight! And as I must struggle — *must*, because I was I — to get back into the world on the other side of the mountains, and do what all the dear wicked people there were doing, why, I have been a criminal all my life! And *that* is n’t exhilarating always.’

And she raised her arm and let it fall beside her with the quick over-tragic emotion of nineteen.

‘I wish your father could have heard you play as I heard you play yesterday,’ he said gently.

She started. ‘*Did* you hear me — that Wagner?’

He nodded, smiling. She still looked at him, her lips slightly open.

‘Do you want to know what I thought? I have heard much music, you know.’

ROBERT ELSMERE

He laughed into her eyes, as much as to say, 'I am not quite the mummy you thought me, after all!' And she coloured slightly.

'I have heard every violinist of any fame in Europe play, and play often; and it seemed to me that with time — and work — you might play as well as any of them.'

The slight flush became a glow that spread from brow to chin. Then she gave a long breath and turned away, her face resting on her hand.

'And I can't help thinking,' he went on, marvelling inwardly at his own rôle of mentor, and his strange enjoyment of it, 'that if your father had lived till now, and had gone with the times a little, as he must have gone, he would have learnt to take pleasure in your pleasure, and to fit your gift somehow into his scheme of things.'

'Catherine has n't moved with the times,' said Rose dolefully.

Langham was silent. *Gaucherie* seized him again when it became a question of discussing Mrs. Elsmere, his own view was so inconveniently emphatic.

'And you think,' she went on, 'you *really* think, without being too ungrateful to papa, and too unkind to the old Leyburn ghosts' — and a little laugh danced through the vibrating voice — 'I might try and get them to give up Burwood — I might struggle to have my way? I shall, of course I shall! I never was a weak martyr, and never shall be. But one can't help having qualms, though one does n't tell them to one's sisters and cousins and aunts. And sometimes' — she turned her chin round on her hand and looked

SURREY

at him with a delicious shy impulsiveness — ‘sometimes a stranger sees clearer. Do *you* think me a monster, as Catherine does?’

Even as she spoke her own words startled her — the confidence, the abandonment of them. But she held to them bravely; only her eyelids quivered. She had absurdly misjudged this man, and there was a warm penitence in her heart. How kind he had been, how sympathetic!

He rose with her last words, and stood leaning against the mantelpiece, looking down upon her gravely, with the air, as it seemed to her, of her friend, her confessor. Her white childish brow, the little curls of bright hair upon her temples, her parted lips, the pretty folds of the muslin dress, the little foot on the fender — every detail of the picture impressed itself once for all. Langham will carry it with him to his grave.

‘Tell me,’ she said again, smiling divinely, as though to encourage him — ‘tell me quite frankly, down to the bottom, what you think?’

The harsh noise of an opening door in the distance, and a gust of wind sweeping through the house, voices and steps approaching. Rose sprang up, and, for the first time during all the latter part of their conversation, felt a sharp sense of embarrassment.

‘How early you are, Robert!’ she exclaimed, as the study-door opened, and Robert’s wind-blown head and tall form, wrapped in an Inverness cape, appeared on the threshold. ‘Is Catherine tired?’

‘Rather,’ said Robert, the slightest gleam of surprise betraying itself on his face. ‘She has gone to bed, and

ROBERT ELSMERE

told me to ask you to come and say good-night to her.'

'You got my message about not coming from old Martha?' asked Rose. 'I met her on the common.'

'Yes, she gave it us at the church-door.' He went out again into the passage to hang up his greatcoat. She followed, longing to tell him that it was pure accident that took her to the study, but she could not find words in which to do it, and could only say good-night a little abruptly.

'How tempting that fire looks!' said Robert, re-entering the study. 'Were you very cold, Langham, before you lit it?'

'Very,' said Langham, smiling, his arm behind his head, his eyes fixed on the blaze; 'but I have been delightfully warm and happy since.'

Murewell Church



CHAPTER XIV

CATHERINE stopped beside the drawing-room window with a start, caught by something she saw outside.

It was nothing, however, but the figures of Rose and Langham strolling round the garden. A bystander would have been puzzled by the sudden knitting of Catherine's brows over it.

Rose held a red parasol, which gleamed against the trees; Dandie leapt about her, but she was too busy talking to take much notice of him. Talking, chattering, to that cold cynic of a man, for whom only yesterday she had scarcely had a civil word! Catherine felt herself a prey to all sorts of vague unreasonable alarms.

Robert had said to her the night before, with an odd look: 'Wifie, when I came in I found Langham and Rose had been spending the evening together in the study. And I don't know when I have seen Langham so brilliant or so alive as in our smoking talk just now!'

Catherine had laughed him to scorn; but, all the same, she had been a little longer going to sleep than usual. She felt herself almost as much as ever the guardian of her sisters, and the old sensitive nerve was set quivering. And now there could be no question about it — Rose had changed her ground towards Mr. Langham altogether. Her manner at breakfast was evidence enough of it.

Catherine's self-torturing mind leapt on for an instant to all sorts of horrors. *That* man! — and she and

ROBERT ELSMERE

Robert responsible to her mother and her dead father! Never! Then she scolded herself back to common sense. Rose and he had discovered a common subject in music and musicians. That would be quite enough to account for the new-born friendship on Rose's part. And in five more days, the limit of Langham's stay, nothing very dreadful *could* happen, argued the reserved Catherine.

But she was uneasy, and after a bit, as that *tête-à-tête* in the garden still went on, she could not, for the life of her, help interfering. She strolled out to meet them with some woollen stuff hanging over her arm, and made a plaintive and smiling appeal to Rose to come and help her with some preparations for a mothers' meeting to be held that afternoon. Rose, who was supposed by the family to be 'taking care' of her sister at a critical time, had a moment's prick of conscience, and went off with a good grace. Langham felt vaguely that he owed Mrs. Elsmere another grudge, but he resigned himself and took out a cigarette, wherewith to console himself for the loss of his companion.

Presently, as he stood for a moment turning over some new books on the drawing-room table, Rose came in. She held an armful of blue serge, and, going up to a table in the window, she took from it a little work-case, and was about to vanish again when Langham went up to her.

'You look intolerably busy,' he said to her, discontentedly.

'Six dresses, ten cloaks, eight petticoats to cut out by luncheon-time,' she answered demurely, with

SURREY

a countenance of most Dorcas-like seriousness, 'and if I spoil them I shall have to pay for the stuff!'

He shrugged his shoulders and looked at her, smiling, still master of himself and of his words.

'And no music — none at all? Perhaps you don't know that I too can accompany?'

'You play!' she exclaimed, incredulous.

'Try me.'

The light of his fine black eyes seemed to encompass her. She moved backward a little, shaking her head. 'Not this morning,' she said. 'Oh dear, no, not this morning! I am afraid you don't know anything about tacking or fixing, or the abominable time they take. Well, it could hardly be expected. There is nothing in the world' — and she shook her serge vindictively — 'that I hate so much!'

'And not this afternoon, for Robert and I go fishing. But this evening?' he said, detaining her.

She nodded lightly, dropped her lovely eyes with a sudden embarrassment, and went away with lightning quickness.

A minute or two later Elsmere laid a hand on his friend's shoulder. 'Come and see the Hall, old fellow. It will be our last chance, for the squire and his sister come back this afternoon. I must parochialise a bit afterwards, but you shan't be much victimised.'

Langham submitted, and they sallied forth. It was a soft rainy morning, one of the first heralds of autumn. Grey mists were drifting silently across the woods and the wide stubbles of the now shaven cornfield, where white lines of reapers were at work, as the morning cleared, making and stacking the sheaves. After a

ROBERT ELSMERE

stormy night the garden was strewn with *débris*, and here and there noiseless prophetic showers of leaves were dropping on the lawn.

Elsmere took his guest along a bit of common, where great black junipers stood up like magnates in council above the motley undergrowth of fern and heather, and then they turned into the park. A great stretch of dimpled land it was, falling softly towards the south and west, bounded by a shining twisted river, and commanding from all its highest points a heathery world of distance, now turned a stormy purple under the drooping fringes of the rain-clouds. They walked downwards from the moment of entering it, till at last, when they reached a wooded plateau about a hundred feet above the river, the house itself came suddenly into view.

That was a house of houses! The large main building, as distinguished from the lower stone portions to the north which represented a fragment of the older Elizabethan house, had been in its day the crown and boast of Jacobean house-architecture. It was fretted and jewelled with Renaissance terra-cotta work from end to end; each gable had its lacework, each window its carved setting. And yet the lines of the whole were so noble, genius had hit the general proportions so finely, that no effect of stateliness or grandeur had been missed through all the accumulation of ornament. Majestic relic of a vanished England, the house rose amid the August woods rich in every beauty that site, and wealth, and centuries could give to it. The river ran about it as though it loved it. The cedars which had kept it company for well-nigh two centuries gath-

ered proudly round it; the deer grouped themselves in the park beneath it, as though they were conscious elements in a great whole of loveliness.

The two friends were admitted by a housemaid who happened to be busy in the hall, and whose red cheeks and general breathlessness bore witness to the energy of the storm of preparation now sweeping through the house.

The famous hall to which Elsmere at once drew Langham's attention was, however, in no way remarkable for size or height. It told comparatively little of seignorial dignity, but it was as though generation after generation had employed upon its perfecting the craft of its most delicate fingers, the love of its most fanciful and ingenious spirits. Overhead, the stucco-work ceiling, covered with stags and birds and strange heraldic creatures unknown to science, had the deep creamy tint, the consistency and surface of antique ivory. From the white-and-gilt frieze beneath, untouched, so Robert explained, since the Jacobean days when it was first executed, hung Renaissance tapestries which would have made the heart's delight of any romantic child, so rich they were in groves of marvellous trees hung with red and golden fruits, in far-reaching palaces and rock-built citadels, in flying shepherdesses and pursuing shepherds. Between the tapestries, again, there were breadths of carved paneling, crowded with all things round and sweet, with fruits and flowers and strange musical instruments, with flying cherubs, and fair faces in laurel-wreathed medallions; while in the middle of the wall a great oriel window broke the dim venerable surfaces of

ROBERT ELSMERE

wood and tapestry with stretches of jewelled light. Tables crowded with antiques, with Tanagra figures or Greek vases, with Florentine bronzes or specimens of the wilful vivacious wood-carving of seventeenth-century Spain, stood scattered on the Persian carpets. And, to complete the whole, the gardeners had just been at work on the corners of the hall, and of the great window, so that the hard-won subtleties of man's by-gone handiwork, with which the splendid room was encrusted from top to bottom, were masked and relieved here and there by the careless easy splendour of flowers, which had but to bloom in order to eclipse them all.

Robert was at home in the great pile, where for many months he had gone freely in and out on his way to the library, and the housekeeper only met him to make an apology for her working dress, and to hand over to him the keys of the library bookcases, with the fretful comment that seemed to have in it the ghostly voice of generations of housemaids, 'Oh lor', sir, they are a trouble, them books!'

From the drawing-rooms, full of a more modern and less poetical magnificence, where Langham turned restless and refractory, Elsmere with a smile took his guest silently back into the hall, and opened a carved door behind a curtain. Passing through, they found themselves in a long passage lighted by small windows on the left-hand side.

'This passage, please notice,' said Robert, 'leads to nothing but the wing containing the library, or rather libraries, which is the oldest part of the house. I always enter it with a kind of pleasing awe! Consider

SURREY

these carpets, which keep out every sound, and look how everything gets older as we go on.'

For halfway down the passage the ceiling seemed to descend upon their heads, the flooring became uneven, and woodwork and walls showed that they had passed from the Jacobean house into the much older Tudor building. Presently Robert led the way up a few shallow steps, pushed open a heavy door, also covered by curtains, and bade his companion enter.

They found themselves in a low immense room, running at right angles to the passage they had just quitted. The long diamond-paned window, filling almost half of the opposite wall, faced the door by which they had come in; the heavy carved mantelpiece was to their right; an open doorway on their left, closed at present by tapestry hangings, seemed to lead into yet other rooms.

The walls of this one were completely covered from floor to ceiling with latticed bookcases, enclosed throughout in a frame of oak carved in light classical relief by what appeared to be a French hand of the sixteenth century. The chequered bindings of the books, in which the creamy tints of vellum predominated, lined the whole surface of the wall with a delicate sobriety of colour; over the mantelpiece, the picture of the founder of the house — a Holbein portrait, glorious in red robes and fur and golden necklace — seemed to gather up and give voice to all the dignity and impressiveness of the room beneath him; while on the window side the book-lined wall was, as it were, replaced by the wooded face of a hill, clothed in dark lines of trimmed yews, which rose abruptly about a

hundred yards from the house and overshadowed the whole library wing. Between the window and the hill, however, was a small old English garden, closely hedged round with yew hedges, and blazing now with every flower that an English August knows — with sun-flowers, tiger-lilies, and dahlias white and red. The window was low, so that the flowers seemed to be actually in the room, challenging the pale tints of the books, the tawny browns and blues of the Persian carpet, and the scarlet splendours of the courtier over the mantelpiece. The room was lit up besides by a few gleaming casts from the antique, by the ‘Diane Chasseresse’ of the Louvre, by the Hermes of Praxiteles smiling with immortal kindness on the child enthroned upon his arm, and by a Donatello figure of a woman in marble, its subtle sweet austerity contrasting with the Greek frankness and blitheness of its companions.

Langham was penetrated at once by the spell of this strange and beautiful place. The fastidious instincts which had been half-revolved by the costly accumulations, the overblown splendours of the drawing-room, were abundantly satisfied here.

‘So it was here,’ he said, looking round him, ‘that that man wrote “The Idols of the Market-place”?’

‘I imagine so,’ said Robert; ‘if so, he might well have felt a little more charity towards the human race in writing it. The race cannot be said to have treated him badly on the whole. But now look, Langham, look at these books — the most precious things are here.’

And he turned the key of a particular section of the wall, which was not only latticed but glazed.

SURREY

‘Here is “A Mirror for Magistrates.” Look at the title-page; you will find Gabriel Harvey’s name on it. Here is a first edition of “Astrophel” and “Stella,” another of the “Arcadia.” They may very well be presentation copies, for the Wendover of that day is known to have been a wit and a writer. Imagine finding them *in situ* like this in the same room, perhaps on the same shelves, as at the beginning! The other rooms on this floor have been annexed since, but this room was always a library.’

Langham took the volumes reverently from Robert’s hands into his own, the scholar’s passion hot within him. That glazed case was indeed a storehouse of treasures. Ben Jonson’s ‘Underwoods’ with his own corrections; a presentation copy of Andrew Marvell’s ‘Poems,’ with autograph notes; manuscript volumes of letters, containing almost every famous name known to English literature in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the literary cream, in fact, of all the vast collection which filled the muniment room upstairs; books which had belonged to Addison, to Sir William Temple, to Swift, to Horace Walpole; the four folios of Shakespeare, all perfect, and most of the quartos — everything that the heart of the English collector could most desire was there. And the charm of it was that only a small proportion of these precious things represented conscious and deliberate acquisition. The great majority of them had, as it were, drifted thither one by one, carried there by the tide of English letters as to a warm and natural resting-place.

But Robert grew impatient, and hurried on his

ROBERT ELSMERE

guest to other things — to the shelves of French rarities, ranging from Du Bellay's 'Visions,' with his autograph, down to the copy of 'Les Mémoires d'Outre-Tombe' presented by Châteaubriand to Madame Récamier, or to a dainty manuscript volume in the fine writing of Lamartine.

'These,' Robert explained, 'were collected, I believe, by the squire's father. He was not in the least literary, so they say, but it had always been a point of honour to carry on the library, and as he had learnt French well in his youth he bought French things, taking advice, but without knowing much about them, I imagine. It was in the room overhead,' said Robert, laying down the book he held, and speaking in a lower key, 'so the old doctor of the house told me a few weeks ago, that the same poor soul put an end to himself twenty years ago.'

'What in the name of fortune did he do that for?'

'Mania,' said Robert quietly.

'Whew!' said the other, lifting his eyebrows. 'Is that the skeleton in this very magnificent cupboard?'

'It has been the Wendover scourge from the beginning, so I hear. Every one about here of course explains this man's eccentricities by the family history. But I don't know,' said Robert, his lip hardening, 'it may be extremely convenient sometimes to have a tradition of the kind. A man who knew how to work it might very well enjoy all the advantages of sanity and the privileges of insanity at the same time. The poor old doctor I was telling you of — old Meyrick — who has known the squire since his boyhood, and has a dog-like attachment to him, is always hinting at

SURREY

mysterious excuses. Whenever I let out to him, as I do sometimes, as to the state of the property, he talks of "inherited melancholy," "rash judgements," and so forth. I like the good old soul, but I don't believe much of it. A man who is sane enough to make a great name for himself in letters is sane enough to provide his estate with a decent agent.'

'It does n't follow,' said Langham, who was, however, so deep in a collection of Spanish romances and chronicles that the squire's mental history did not seem to make much impression upon him. 'Most men of letters are mad, and I should be inclined,' he added, with a sudden and fretful emphasis, 'to argue much worse things for the sanity of your squire, Elsmere, from the fact that this room is undoubtedly allowed to get damp sometimes, than from any of those absurd parochial tests of yours.'

And he held up a couple of priceless books, of which the Spanish sheepskin bindings showed traces here and there of moisture.

'It is no use, I know, expecting you to preserve a moral sense when you get among books,' said Robert with a shrug. 'I will reserve my remarks on that subject. But you must really tear yourself away from this room, Langham, if you want to see the rest of the squire's quarters. Here you have what we may call the ornamental sensational part of the library, that part of it which would make a stir at Sotheby's; the working parts are all to come.'

Langham reluctantly allowed himself to be dragged away. Robert held back the hangings over the doorway leading into the rest of the wing, and, passing

ROBERT ELSMERE

through, they found themselves in a continuation of the library totally different in character from the magnificent room they had just left. The walls were no longer latticed and carved; they were closely packed, in the most business-like way, with books which represented the squire's own collection, and were in fact a chart of his own intellectual history.

'This is how I interpret this room,' said Robert, looking round it. 'Here are the books he collected at Oxford in the Tractarian Movement and afterwards. Look here,' and he pulled out a volume of 'St. Basil.'

Langham looked, and saw on the title-page a note in faded characters: '*Given to me by Newman at Oxford, in 1845.*'

'Ah, of course, he was one of them in '45; he must have left them very soon after,' said Langham reflectively.

Robert nodded. 'But look at them! There are the Tracts, all the Fathers, all the Councils, and masses, as you see, of Anglican theology. Now look at the next case, nothing but eighteenth century!'

'I see, — from the Fathers to the Philosophers, from Hooker to Hume. How history repeats itself in the individual!'

'And there again,' said Robert, pointing to the other side of the room, 'are the results of his life as a German student.'

'Germany — ah, I remember! How long was he there?'

'Ten years, at Berlin and Heidelberg. According to old Meyrick, he buried his last chance of living like other men at Berlin. His years of extravagant labour

SURREY

there have left marks upon him physically that can never be effaced. But that bookcase fascinates me. Half the great names of modern thought are in those books.'

And so they were. The first Langham opened had a Latin dedication in a quavering old man's hand, 'Amico et discipulo meo,' signed 'Fredericus Gulielmus Schelling.' The next bore the autograph of Alexander von Humboldt, the next that of Boeckh, the famous classic, and so on. Close by was Niebuhr's History, in the title-page of which a few lines in the historian's handwriting bore witness to much 'pleasant discourse between the writer and Roger Wendover, at Bonn, in the summer of 1847.' Judging from other shelves farther down, he must also have spent some time, perhaps an academic year, at Tübingen, for here were most of the early editions of the 'Leben Jesu,' with some corrections from Strauss's hand, and similar records of Baur, Ewald, and other members or opponents of the Tübingen school. And so on, through the whole bookcase. Something of everything was there — Philosophy, Theology, History, Philology. The collection was a medley, and made almost a spot of disorder in the exquisite neatness and system of the vast gathering of which it formed part. Its bond of union was simply that it represented the forces of an epoch, the thoughts, the men, the occupations which had absorbed the energies of ten golden years. Every book seemed to be full of paper marks; almost every title-page was covered with minute writing, which, when examined, proved to contain a record of lectures, or conversations with the author of the volume, sometimes a string of anecdotes or a short biography,

rapidly sketched out of the fulness of personal knowledge, and often seasoned with a subtle causticity and wit. A history of modern thinking Germany, of that 'unextinguished hearth' whence the mind of Europe has been kindled for three generations, might almost have been evolved from that bookcase and its contents alone.

Langham, as he stood peering among the ugly, vilely-printed German volumes, felt suddenly a kind of magnetic influence creeping over him. The room seemed instinct with a harsh commanding presence. The history of a mind and soul was written upon the face of it; every shelf, as it were, was an autobiographical fragment, an 'Apologia pro Vita Mea.' He drew away from the books at last with the uneasy feeling of one who surprises a confidence, and looked for Robert. Robert was at the end of the room, a couple of volumes under his arm, another, which he was reading, in his hand.

'This is *my* corner,' he said, smiling and flushing a little, as his friend moved up to him. 'Perhaps you don't know that I too am engaged upon a great work.'

'A great work — you?'

Langham looked at his companion as though to find out whether his remark was meant seriously or whether he might venture to be cynical. Elsmere writing! Why should everybody write books? It was absurd! The scholar who knows what toll scholarship takes of life is always apt to resent the intrusion of the man of action into his domains. It looks to him like a kind of ridiculous assumption that any one *d'un cœur léger* can do what has cost him his heart's blood.

SURREY

Robert understood something of the meaning of his tone, and replied almost apologetically ; he was always singularly modest about himself on the intellectual side.

‘Well, Grey is responsible. He gave me such a homily before I left Oxford on the absolute necessity of keeping up with books, that I could do nothing less than set up a “subject” at once. “Half the day,” he used to say to me, “you will be king of your world ; the other half be the slave of something which will take you out of your world into the general world” ; and then he would quote to me that saying he was always bringing into lectures — I forget whose it is — “*The decisive events of the world take place in the intellect*. It is the mission of books that they help one to remember it.” Altogether it was striking, coming from one who has always had such a tremendous respect for practical life and work, and I was much impressed by it. So blame him !’

Langham was silent. Elsmere had noticed that any allusion to Grey found Langham less and less responsive.

‘Well, what is the “great work” ?’ he said at last, abruptly.

‘Historical. Oh, I should have written something without Grey ; I have always had a turn for it since I was a child. But he was clear that history was especially valuable — especially necessary to a clergyman. I felt he was right, entirely right. So I took my Final Schools’ history for a basis, and started on the Empire, especially the decay of the Empire. Some day I mean to take up one of the episodes in the great birth of

ROBERT ELSMERE

Europe — the makings of France, I think, most likely. It seems to lead farthest and tell most. I have been at work now nine months.'

'And are just getting into it?'

'Just about. I have got down below the surface, and am beginning to feel the joys of digging'; and Robert threw back his head with one of his most brilliant enthusiastic smiles. 'I have been shy about boring you with the thing, but the fact is, I am very keen indeed; and this library has been a godsend!'

'So I should think.' Langham sat down on one of the carved wooden stools placed at intervals along the bookcases and looked at his friend, his psychological curiosity rising a little.

'Tell me,' he said presently — 'tell me what interests you specially — what seizes you — in a subject like the making of France, for instance?'

'Do you really want to know?' said Robert, incredulously.

The other nodded. Robert left his place, and began to walk up and down, trying to answer Langham's question, and at the same time to fix in speech a number of sentiments and impressions bred in him by the work of the past few months. After a while Langham began to see his way. Evidently the forces at the bottom of this new historical interest were precisely the same forces at work in Elsmere's parish plans, in his sermons, in his dealings with the poor and the young — forces of imagination and sympathy. What was enchainning him to this new study was not, to begin with, that patient love of ingenious accumulation which is the learned temper proper, the temper, in

SURREY

short, of science. It was simply a passionate sense of the human problems which underlie all the dry and dusty detail of history and give it tone and colour, a passionate desire to rescue something more of human life from the drowning, submerging past, to realise for himself and others the solidarity and continuity of mankind's long struggle from the beginning until now.

Langham had had much experience of Elsmere's versatility and pliancy, but he had never realised it so much as now, while he sat listening to the vivid, many-coloured speech getting quicker and quicker, and more and more telling and original as Robert got more absorbed and excited by what he had to say. He was endeavouring to describe to Langham the sort of book he thought might be written on the rise of modern society in Gaul, dwelling first of all on the outward spectacle of the blood-stained Frankish world as it was, say, in the days of Gregory the Great, on its savage kings, its fiendish women, its bishops and its saints; and then, on the conflict of ideas going on behind all the fierce incoherence of the Empire's decay, the struggle of Roman order and German freedom, of Roman luxury with German hardness; above all, the war of orthodoxy and heresy, with its strange political complications. And then, discontented still, as though the heart of the matter were still untouched, he went on, restlessly wandering the while, with his long arms linked behind him, 'throwing out' words at an object in his mind, trying to grasp and analyse that strange sense which haunts the student of Rome's decline as it once overshadowed the infancy of Europe, — as of a slowly departing majesty, a great presence

ROBERT ELSMERE

just withdrawn, and still incalculably potent, traceable throughout in that humbling consciousness of Goth or Frank that they were but 'beggars hutting in a palace — the place had harboured greater men than they!'

'There is one thing,' Langham said presently, in his slow nonchalant voice, when the tide of Robert's ardour ebbed for a moment, 'that does n't seem to have touched you yet. But you will come to it. To my mind, it makes almost the chief interest of history. It is just this. History depends on *testimony*. What is the nature and the value of testimony at given times? In other words, did the man of the third century understand, or report, or interpret facts in the same way as the man of the sixteenth or the nineteenth? And if not, what are the differences, and what are the deductions to be made from them, if any?' He fixed his keen look on Robert, who was now lounging against the books, as though his harangue had taken it out of him a little.

'Ah, well,' said the rector, smiling, 'I am only just coming to that. As I told you, I am only now beginning to dig for myself. Till now it has all been work at second-hand. I have been getting a general survey of the ground as quickly as I could with the help of other men's labours. Now I must go to work inch by inch, and find out what the ground is made of. I won't forget your point. It is enormously important, I grant — enormously,' he repeated reflectively.

'I should think it is,' said Langham to himself as he rose; 'the whole of orthodox Christianity is in it, for instance!'

SURREY

There was not much more to be seen. A little wooden staircase led from the second library to the upper rooms, curious old rooms, which had been annexed one by one as the squire wanted them, and in which there was nothing at all — neither chair, nor table, nor carpet — but books only. All the doors leading from room to room had been taken off; the old worm-eaten boards had been roughly stained; a few old French engravings had been hung here and there where the encroaching books left an opening; but otherwise all was bare. There was a curious charm in the space and air of these empty rooms, with their latticed windows opening on to the hill, and letting in day by day the summer sun-risings or the winter dawns, which had shone upon them for more than three centuries.

‘This is my last day of privilege,’ said Robert. ‘Everybody is shut out, when once he appears, from this wing, and this part of the grounds. This was his father’s room,’ and the rector led the way into the last of the series; ‘and through there,’ pointing to a door on the right, ‘lies the way to his own sleeping-room, which is of course connected with the more modern side of the house.’

‘So this is where that old man ventured “what Cato did and Addison approved,”’ murmured Langham, standing in the middle of the room and looking round him. This particular room was now used as a sort of lumber place, a receptacle for the superfluous or useless books gradually thrown off by the great collection all around. There were innumerable volumes in frayed or broken bindings lying on the ground. A musty

ROBERT ELSMERE

smell hung over it all; the grey light from outside, which seemed to give only an added subtlety and charm to the other portions of the ancient building through which they had been moving, seemed here *triste* and dreary. Or Langham fancied it.

He passed the threshold again with a little sigh, and saw suddenly before him at the end of the suite of rooms, and framed in the doorways facing him, an engraving of a Greuze picture — a girl's face turned over her shoulder, the hair waving about her temples, the lips parted, the teeth gleaming, mirth and provocation and tender yielding in every line. Langham started, and the blood rushed to his heart. It was as though Rose herself stood there and beckoned to him.

CHAPTER XV

Now, having seen our sight,' said Robert, as they left the great mass of Murewell behind them, 'come and see our scandal. Both run by the same proprietor, if you please. There is a hamlet down there in the hollow' — and he pointed to a grey speck in the distance — 'which deserves a Royal Commission all to itself, which is a *disgrace*' — and his tone warmed — 'to any country, any owner, any agent! It is owned by Mr. Wendover, and I see the pleasing prospect straight before me of beginning my acquaintance with him by a fight over it. You will admit that it is a little hard on a man who wants to live on good terms with the possessor of the Murewell library to have to open relations with him by a fierce attack on his drains and his pig-sties.'

He turned to his companion with a half-rueful spark of laughter in his grey eyes. Langham hardly caught what he said. He was far away in meditations of his own.

'An attack,' he repeated vaguely; 'why an attack?'

Robert plunged again into the great topic of which his quick mind was evidently full. Langham tried to listen, but was conscious that his friend's social enthusiasms bored him a great deal. And side by side with the consciousness there slid in a little stinging reflexion that four years ago no talk of Elsmere's could have bored him.

ROBERT ELSMERE

‘What’s the matter with this particular place?’ he asked languidly, at last, raising his eyes towards the group of houses now beginning to emerge from the distance.

An angry red mounted in Robert’s cheek.

‘What is n’t the matter with it? The houses, which were built on a swamp originally, are falling into ruin; the roofs, the drains, the accommodation per head, are all about equally scandalous. The place is harried with illness; since I came there have been both fever and diphtheria there. They are all crippled with rheumatism, but *that* they think nothing of; the English labourer takes rheumatism as quite in the day’s bargain! And as to *vice* — the vice that comes of mere endless persecuting opportunity — I can tell you one’s ideas of personal responsibility get a good deal shaken up by a place like this! And I can do nothing. I brought over Henslowe to see the place, and he behaved like a brute. He scoffed at all my complaints, said that no landlord would be such a fool as to build fresh cottages on such a site, that the old ones must just be allowed to go to ruin; that the people might live in them if they chose, or turn out of them if they chose. Nobody forced them to do either; it was their own look-out.’

‘That was true,’ said Langham, ‘was n’t it?’

Robert turned upon him fiercely.

‘Ah! you think it so easy for those poor creatures to leave their homes, their working-places! Some of them have been there thirty years. They are close to the two or three farms that employ them, close to the osier beds which give them extra earnings in the spring.

SURREY

If they were turned out there is nothing nearer than Murewell, and not a single cottage to be found there. I don't say it is a landlord's duty to provide more cottages than are wanted ; but if the labour is wanted, the labourer should be decently housed. He is worthy of his hire, and woe to the man who neglects or ill-treats him !'

Langham could not help smiling, partly at the vehemence of the speech, partly at the lack of adjustment between his friend's mood and his own. He braced himself to take the matter more seriously, but meanwhile Robert had caught the smile, and his angry eyes melted at once into laughter.

'There I am, ranting as usual,' he said penitently. 'Took you for Henslowe, I suppose ! Ah, well, never mind. I hear the Provost has another book on the stocks.'

So they diverged into other things, talking politics and new books, public men and what not, till, at the end of a long and gradual descent through wooded ground, some two miles to the northwest of the park, they emerged from the trees beneath which they had been walking, and found themselves on a bridge, a grey sluggish stream flowing beneath them, and the hamlet they sought rising among the river flats on the farther side.

'There,' said Robert, stopping, 'we are at our journey's end. Now then, what sort of a place of human habitation do you call *that* ?'

The bridge whereon they stood crossed the main channel of the river, which just at that point, however, parted into several branches, and came meandering

ROBERT ELSMERE

slowly down through a little bottom or valley, filled with osier beds, long since robbed of their year's growth of shoots. On the other side of the river, on ground all but level with the osier beds which interposed between them and the stream, rose a miserable group of houses, huddled together as though their bulging walls and rotten roofs could only maintain themselves at all by the help and support which each wretched hovel gave to its neighbour. The mud walls were stained with yellow patches of lichen, the palings round the little gardens were broken and ruinous. Close beside them all was a sort of open drain or water-course, stagnant and noisome, which dribbled into the river a little above the bridge. Behind them rose a high gravel bank edged by firs, and a line of oak trees against the sky. The houses stood in the shadow of the bank looking north, and on this grey, lowering day, the dreariness, the gloom, the squalor of the place were indescribable.

‘Well, that is a God-forsaken hole!’ said Langham, studying it, his interest roused at last, rather, perhaps, by the Ruysdael-like melancholy and picturesqueness of the scene than by its human suggestiveness. ‘I could hardly have imagined such a place existed in Southern England. It is more like a bit of Ireland.’

‘If it were Ireland it might be to somebody's interest to ferret it out,’ said Robert bitterly. ‘But these poor folks are out of the world. They may be brutalised with impunity. Oh, such a case as I had here last autumn! A young girl of sixteen or seventeen, who would have been healthy and happy anywhere else, stricken by the damp and the poison of the place,

SURREY

dying in six weeks, of complications due to nothing in the world but preventable cruelty and neglect! It was a sight that burnt into my mind, once for all, what is meant by a landlord's responsibility. I tried, of course, to move her, but neither she nor her parents — elderly folk — had energy enough for a change. They only prayed to be let alone. I came over the last evening of her life to give her the communion. "Ah, sir!" said the mother to me — not bitterly — that is the strange thing, they have so little bitterness — "if Mister 'Enslove would jest 'a mended that bit o' roof of ours last winter, Bessie need n't have laid in the wet so many nights as she did, and she coughin' fit to break your heart, for all the things yer could put over 'er.'"

Robert paused, his strong young face, so vehemently angry a few minutes before, tremulous with feeling. 'Ah, well,' he said at last with a long breath, moving away from the parapet of the bridge on which he had been leaning, 'better be oppressed than oppressor, any day! Now, then, I must deliver my stores. There's a child here Catherine and I have been doing our best to pull through typhoid.'

They crossed the bridge and turned down the track leading to the hamlet. Some planks carried them across the ditch, the main sewer of the community, as Robert pointed out, and they made their way through the filth surrounding one of the nearest cottages.

A feeble elderly man, whose shaking limbs and sallow bloodless skin made him look much older than he actually was, opened the door and invited them to come in. Robert passed on into an inner room, con-

ducted thither by a woman who had been sitting working over the fire. Langham stood irresolute; but the old man's quavering 'Kindly take a chair, sir; you've come a long way,' decided him, and he stepped in.

Inside the hovel was miserable indeed. It belonged to that old and evil type which the efforts of the last twenty years have done so much all over England to sweep away: four mud walls, enclosing an oblong space about eight yards long, divided into two unequal portions by a lath and plaster partition, with no upper storey, a thatched roof, now entirely out of repair, and letting in the rain in several places, and a paved floor little better than the earth itself, so large and cavernous were the gaps between the stones. The dismal place had no small adornings — none of those little superfluities which, however ugly and trivial, are still so precious in the dwellings of the poor, as showing the existence of some instinct or passion which is not the creation of the sheerest physical need; and Langham, as he sat down, caught the sickening marsh smell which the Oxford man, accustomed to the odours of damp meadows in times of ebbing flood and festering sun, knows so well. As old Milsom began to talk to him in his weak tremulous voice, the visitor's attention was irresistibly held by the details about him. Fresh as he was from all the delicate sights, the harmonious colours and delightful forms of the squire's house, they made an unusually sharp impression on his fastidious senses. What does human life become lived on reeking floors and under stifling roofs like these? What strange abnormal deteriorations, physical and spiritual, must it not inevitably undergo?

SURREY

Langham felt a sudden inward movement of disgust and repulsion. 'For heaven's sake, keep your superstitions!' he could have cried to the whole human race, 'or any other narcotic that a grinding fate has left you. What does *anything* matter to the mass of mankind but a little ease, a little lightening of pressure on this side or on that?'

Meanwhile the old man went maundering on, talking of the weather, and of his sick child, and 'Mr. Elsmere,' with a kind of listless incoherence which hardly demanded an answer, though Langham threw in a word or two here and there.

Among other things, he began to ask a question or two about Robert's predecessor, a certain Mr. Preston, who had left behind him a memory of amiable evangelical indolence.

'Did you see much of him?' he asked.

'Oh law, no, sir!' replied the man, surprised into something like energy. 'Never seed 'im more 'n once a year, and sometimes not that!'

'Was he liked here?'

'Well, sir, it was like this, you see. My wife, she's North-country, she is, comes from Yorkshire; sometimes she'd used to say to me, "Passon 'ee ain't much good, and passon 'ee ain't much harm. 'Ee's no more good nor more 'arm, so fer as *I* can see, nor a chip in a basin o' parritch." And that was just about it, sir,' said the old man, pleased for the hundredth time with his wife's bygone flight of metaphor and his own exact memory of it.

As to the rector's tendance of his child, his tone was very cool and guarded.

ROBERT ELSMERE

‘It do seem strange, sir, as nor he nor Doctor Grimes ’ull let her have anything to put a bit of flesh on her, nothin’ but them messy things as he brings — milk an’ that. An’ the beef jelly — lor’, such a trouble! Missis Elsmere, he tells my wife, strains all the stuff through a cloth, she do; never seed anythin’ like it, nor my wife neither. People is clever nowadays,’ said the speaker dubiously.

Langham realised that, in this quarter of his parish at any rate, his friend’s pastoral vanity, if he had any, would not find much to feed on. Nothing, to judge from this specimen at least, greatly affected an inhabitant of Mile End. Gratitude, responsiveness, imply health and energy, past or present. The only constant defence which the poor have against such physical conditions as those which prevailed at Mile End is apathy.

As they came down the dilapidated steps at the cottage door, Robert drew in with avidity a long draught of the outer air.

‘Ugh!’ he said with a sort of groan, ‘that bedroom! Nothing gives one such a sense of the toughness of human life as to see a child recovering, actually recovering, in such a pestilential den! Father, mother, grown-up son, girl of thirteen, and grandchild, all huddled in a space just fourteen feet square. Langham!’ and he turned passionately on his companion, ‘what defence can be found for a man who lives in a place like Murewell Hall, and can take money from human beings for the use of a sty like that?’

‘Gently, my friend. Probably the squire, being the sort of recluse he is, has never seen the place, or, at any rate, not for years, and knows nothing about it!’

SURREY

‘More shame for him!’

‘True in a sense,’ said Langham, a little drily; ‘but as you *may* want hereafter to make excuses for your man, and he *may* give you occasion, I would n’t begin by painting him to yourself any blacker than need be.’

Robert laughed, sighed and acquiesced. ‘I am a hot-headed, impatient kind of creature at the best of times,’ he confessed. ‘They tell me that great things have been done for the poor round here in the last twenty years. Something has been done, certainly. But why are the old ways, the old evil neglect and apathy, so long, so terribly long in dying? This social progress of ours we are so proud of is a clumsy limping jade at best!’

They prowled a little more about the hamlet, every step almost revealing some new source of poison and disease. Of their various visits, however, Langham remembered nothing afterwards but a little scene in a miserable cottage, where they found a whole family party gathered round the midday meal. A band of puny, black, black-eyed children were standing or sitting at the table. The wife, confined of twins three weeks before, sat by the fire, deathly pale, a ‘bad leg’ stretched out before her on some improvised support, one baby on her lap and another dark-haired bundle asleep in a cradle beside her. There was a pathetic pinched beauty about the whole family. Even the tiny twins were comparatively shapely; all the other children had delicate transparent skins, large eyes, and small colourless mouths. The father, a picturesque handsome fellow, looking as though he had gipsy blood in his veins, had opened the door to their knock.

ROBERT ELSMERE

- Robert, seeing the meal, would have retreated at once, in spite of the children's shy inviting looks, but a glance past them at the mother's face checked the word of refusal and apology on his lips, and he stepped in.

In after years Langham was always apt to see him in imagination as he saw him then, standing beside the bent figure of the mother, his quick pitiful eyes taking in the pallor and exhaustion of face and frame, his hand resting instinctively on the head of a small creature that had crept up beside him, his look all attention and softness as the woman feebly told him some of the main facts of her state. The young rector at the moment might have stood for the modern 'Man of Feeling,' as sensitive, as impressionable, and as free from the burden of self, as his eighteenth-century prototype.

On the way home Robert suddenly remarked to his companion, 'Have you heard my sister-in-law play yet, Langham? What did you think of it?'

'Extraordinary!' said Langham briefly. 'The most considerable gift I ever came across in an amateur.'

His olive cheek flushed a little involuntarily. Robert threw a quick observant look at him.

'The difficulty,' he exclaimed, 'is to know what to do with it!'

'Why do you make the difficulty? I gather she wants to study abroad. What is there to prevent it?'

Langham turned to his companion with a touch of asperity. He could not stand it that Elsmere should be so much narrowed and warped by that wife of his, and her prejudices. Why should that gifted creature be cribbed, cabined, and confined in this way?

SURREY

‘I grant you,’ said Robert, with a look of perplexity, ‘there is not much to prevent it.’

And he was silent a moment, thinking, on his side, very tenderly of all the antecedents and explanations of that old-world distrust of art and the artistic life so deeply rooted in his wife, even though in practice and under his influence she had made concession after concession.

‘The great solution of all,’ he said presently, brightening, ‘would be to get her married. I don’t wonder her belongings dislike the notion of anything so pretty and so flighty going off to live by itself. And to break up the home in Whindale would be to undo everything their father did for them, to defy his most solemn last wishes.’

‘To talk of a father’s wishes, in a case of this kind, ten years after his death, is surely excessive?’ said Langham, with dry interrogation; then, suddenly recollecting himself, ‘I beg your pardon, Elsmere. I am interfering.’

‘Nonsense,’ said Robert brightly. ‘I don’t wonder it seems like a difficulty of our own making. Like so many difficulties, it depends on character, present character, bygone character —’ And again he fell musing on his Westmoreland experiences, and on the intensity of that Puritan type it had revealed to him. ‘However, as I said, marriage would be the natural way out of it.’

‘An easy way, I should think,’ said Langham, after a pause.

‘It won’t be so easy to find the right man. She is a young person with a future, is Miss Rose. She wants

ROBERT ELSMERE

somebody in the stream; somebody with a strong hand who will keep her in order and yet give her a wide range; a rich man, I think — she has n't the ways of a poor man's wife; but, at any rate, some one who will be proud of her, and yet have a full life of his own in which she may share.'

'Your views are extremely clear,' said Langham, and his smile had a touch of bitterness in it. 'If hers agree, I prophesy you won't have long to wait. She has beauty, talent, charm — everything that rich and important men like.'

There was the slightest sarcastic note in the voice. Robert winced. It was borne in upon one of the least worldly of mortals that he had been talking like the veriest schemer. What vague quick impulse had driven him on?

By the time they emerged again upon the Murewell Green the rain had cleared altogether away, and the autumnal morning had broken into sunshine, which played mistily on the sleeping woods; on the white fronts of the cottages, and the wide green where the rain-pools glistened. On the hill leading to the rectory there was the flutter of a woman's dress. As they hurried on, afraid of being late for luncheon, they saw that it was Rose in front of them.

Langham started as the slender figure suddenly defined itself against the road. A tumult within, half rage, half feeling, showed itself only in an added rigidity of the finely-cut features.

Rose turned directly she heard the steps and voices, and over the dreaminess of her face there flashed a sudden brightness.

SURREY

‘You *have* been a long time!’ she exclaimed, saying the first thing that came into her head, joyously, rashly, like the child she in reality was. ‘How many halt and maimed has Robert taken you to see, Mr. Langham?’

‘We went to Murewell first. The library was well worth seeing. Since then we have been a parish round, distributing stores.’

Rose’s look changed in an instant. The words were spoken by the Langham of her earliest acquaintance. The man who that morning had asked her to play to him had gone — vanished away.

‘How exhilarating!’ she said scornfully. ‘Don’t you wonder how any one can ever tear themselves away from the country?’

‘Rose, don’t be abusive,’ said Robert, opening his eyes at her tone. Then, passing his arm through hers, he looked banteringly down upon her. ‘For the first time since you left the metropolis you have walked yourself into a colour. It’s becoming — and it’s Murewell — so be civil!’

‘Oh, nobody denies you a high place in milkmaids!’ she said, with her head in air — and they went off into a minute’s sparring.

Meanwhile Langham, on the other side of the road, walked up slowly, his eyes on the ground. Once, when Rose’s eye caught him, a shock ran through her. There was already a look of slovenly age about his stooping bookworm’s gait. Her companion of the night before — handsome, animated, human — where was he? The girl’s heart felt a singular contraction. Then she turned and rent herself, and Robert found her more mocking and sprightly than ever.

ROBERT ELSMERE

At the rectory gate Robert ran on to overtake a farmer on the road. Rose stooped to open the latch; Langham mechanically made a quick movement forward to anticipate her. Their fingers touched; she drew hers hastily away and passed in, an erect and dignified figure, in her curving garden-hat.

Langham went straight up to his room, shut the door, and stood before the open window, deaf and blind to everything save an inward storm of sensation.

‘Fool! Idiot!’ he said to himself at last, with fierce stifled emphasis, while a kind of dumb fury with himself and circumstance swept through him.

That he, the poor and solitary student whose only sources of self-respect lay in the deliberate limitations, the reasoned and reasonable renunciations he had imposed upon his life, should have needed the reminder of his old pupil not to fall in love with his brilliant ambitious sister! His irritable self-consciousness enormously magnified Elsmere’s motive and Elsmere’s words. That golden vagueness and softness of temper which had possessed him since his last sight of her gave place to one of bitter tension.

With sardonic scorn he pointed out to himself that his imagination was still held by, his nerves were still thrilling under, the mental image of a girl looking up to him as no woman had ever looked — a girl, white-armed, white-necked — with softened eyes of appeal and confidence. He bade himself mark that during the whole of his morning walk with Robert down to its last stage, his mind had been really absorbed in some preposterous dream he was now too self-contemptuous to analyse. Pretty well for a philosopher, in four days!

SURREY

What a ridiculous business is life — what a contemptible creature is man, how incapable of dignity, of consistency!

At luncheon he talked rather more than usual, especially on literary matters with Robert. Rose, too, was fully occupied in giving Catherine a sarcastic account of a singing-lesson she had been administering in the school that morning. Catherine winced sometimes at the tone of it.

That afternoon Robert, in high spirits, his rod over his shoulder, his basket at his back, carried off his guest for a lounging afternoon along the river. Elsmere enjoyed these fishing expeditions like a boy. They were his holidays, relished all the more because he kept a jealous account of them with his conscience. He sauntered along, now throwing a cunning and effectual fly, now resting, smoking, and chattering, as the fancy took him. He found a great deal of the old stimulus and piquancy in Langham's society, but there was an occasional irritability in his companion, especially towards himself personally, which puzzled him. After a while, indeed, he began to feel himself the unreasonably cheerful person which he evidently appeared to his companion. A mere ignorant enthusiast, banished for ever from the realm of pure knowledge by certain original and incorrigible defects — after a few hours' talk with Langham Robert's quick insight always showed him some image of himself resembling this in his friend's mind.

At last he turned restive. He had been describing to Langham his acquaintance with the Dissenting minister of the place — a strong coarse-grained fellow

ROBERT ELSMERE

of sensuous excitable temperament, famous for his noisy 'conversion meetings,' and for a gymnastic dexterity in the quoting and combining of texts, unrivalled in Robert's experience. Some remark on the Dissenter's logic, made, perhaps, a little too much in the tone of the Churchman conscious of University advantages, seemed to irritate Langham.

'You think your Anglican logic in dealing with the Bible so superior! On the contrary, I am all for your Ranter. He is your logical Protestant. Historically, you Anglican parsons are where you are and what you are, because Englishmen, as a whole, like attempting the contradictory — like, above all, to eat their cake and have it. The nation has made you and maintains you for its own purposes. But that is another matter.'

Robert smoked on a moment in silence. Then he flushed and laid down his pipe.

'We are all fools in your eyes, I know! *A la bonne heure!* I have been to the University, and talk what he is pleased to call "philosophy" — therefore Mr. Colson denies me faith. You have always, in your heart of hearts, denied me knowledge. But I cling to both in spite of you.'

There was a ray of defiance, of emotion, in his look. Langham met it in silence.

'I deny you nothing,' he said at last, slowly. 'On the contrary, I believe you to be the possessor of all that is best worth having in life and mind.'

His irritation had all died away. His tone was one of indescribable depression, and his great black eyes were fixed on Robert with a melancholy which startled his companion. By a subtle transition Elsmere felt

SURREY

himself touched with a pang of profound pity for the man who an instant before had seemed to pose as his scornful superior. He stretched out his hand, and laid it on his friend's shoulder.

Rose spent the afternoon in helping Catherine with various parochial occupations. In the course of them Catherine asked many questions about Long Whindale. Her thoughts clung to the hills, to the grey farmhouses, the rough men and women inside them. But Rose gave her small satisfaction.

'Poor old Jim Backhouse!' said Catherine, sighing. 'Agnes tells me he is quite bedridden now.'

'Well, and a good thing for John, don't you think,' said Rose briskly, covering a parish library book the while in a way which made Catherine's fingers itch to take it from her, 'and for us? It's some use having a carrier now.'

Catherine made no reply. She thought of the 'noodle' fading out of life in the room where Mary Backhouse died; she actually saw the white hair, the blurred eyes, the palsied hands, the poor emaciated limbs stretched along the settle. Her heart rose, but she said nothing.

'And has Mrs. Thornburgh been enjoying her summer?'

'Oh! I suppose so,' said Rose, her tone indicating a quite measureless indifference. 'She had another young Oxford man staying with her in June — a missionary — and it annoyed her very much that neither Agnes nor I would intervene to prevent his resuming his profession. She seemed to think it was

ROBERT ELSMERE

a question of saving him from being eaten, and apparently he would have proposed to either of us.'

Catherine could not help laughing. 'I suppose she still thinks she married Robert and me.'

'Of course. So she did.'

Catherine coloured a little, but Rose's hard lightness of tone was unconquerable.

'Or if she did n't,' Rose resumed, 'nobody could have the heart to rob her of the illusion. Oh, by the way, Sarah has been under warning since June! Mrs. Thornburgh told her desperately that she must either throw over her young man, who was picked up drunk at the vicarage gate one night, or vacate the vicarage kitchen. Sarah cheerfully accepted her month's notice, and is still making the vicarage jams and walking out with the young man every Sunday. Mrs. Thornburgh sees that it will require a convulsion of Nature to get rid either of Sarah or the young man, and has succumbed.'

'And the Tysons? And that poor Walker girl?'

'Oh, dear me, Catherine!' said Rose, a strange disproportionate flash of impatience breaking through. 'Every one in Long Whindale is always just where and what they were last year. I admit they are born and die, but they do nothing else of a decisive kind.'

Catherine's hands worked away for a while, then she laid down her book and said, lifting her clear large eyes on her sister, —

'Was there *never* a time when you loved the valley, Rose?'

'Never!' cried Rose.

Then she pushed away her work, and leaning her

SURREY

elbows on the table turned her brilliant face to Catherine. There was frank mutiny in it.

‘By the way, Catherine, are you going to prevent mamma from letting me go to Berlin for the winter?’

‘And after Berlin, Rose?’ said Catherine, presently, her gaze bent upon her work.

‘After Berlin? What next?’ said Rose recklessly. ‘Well, after Berlin I shall try to persuade mamma and Agnes, I suppose, to come and back me up in London. We could still be some months of the year at Burwood.’

Now she had said it out. But there was something else surely goading the girl than mere intolerance of the family tradition. The hesitancy, the moral doubt of her conversation with Langham, seemed to have vanished wholly in a kind of acrid self-assertion.

Catherine felt a shock sweep through her. It was as though all the pieties of life, all the sacred assumptions and self-surrenders at the root of it, were shaken, outraged by the girl’s tone.

‘Do you ever remember,’ she said, looking up, while her voice trembled, ‘what papa wished when he was dying?’

It was her last argument. To Rose she had very seldom used it in so many words. Probably, it seemed to her too strong, too sacred, to be often handled.

But Rose sprang up, and pacing the little workroom with her white wrists locked behind her, she met that argument with all the concentrated passion which her youth had for years been storing up against it. Catherine sat presently overwhelmed, bewildered. This language of a proud and tameless individuality, this

ROBERT ELSMERE

modern gospel of the divine right of self-development — her soul loathed it! And yet, since that night in Marrisdale, there had been a new yearning in her to understand.

Suddenly, however, Rose stopped, lost her thread. Two figures were crossing the lawn, and their shadows were thrown far beyond them by the fast disappearing sun.

She threw herself down on her chair again with an abrupt —

‘Do you see they have come back? We must go and dress.’

And as she spoke she was conscious of a new sensation altogether — the sensation of the wild creature lassoed on the prairie, of the bird exchanging in an instant its glorious freedom of flight for the pitiless meshes of the net. It was stifling — her whole nature seemed to fight with it.

Catherine rose and began to put away the books they had been covering. She had said almost nothing in answer to Rose’s tirade. When she was ready she came and stood beside her sister a moment, her lips trembling. At last she stooped and kissed the girl — the kiss of deep suppressed feeling — and went away. Rose made no response.

Unmusical as she was, Catherine pined for her sister’s music that evening. Robert was busy in his study, and the hours seemed interminable. After a little difficult talk Langham subsided into a book and a corner. But the only words of which he was conscious for long were the words of an inner dialogue. ‘I promised to play for her. — Go and offer then! —

SURREY

Madness! let me keep away from her. If she asks me, of course I will go. She is much too proud, and already she thinks me guilty of a rudeness.'

Then, with a shrug, he would fall to his book again, abominably conscious, however, all the while of the white figure between the lamp and the open window, and of the delicate head and cheek lit up against the trees and the soft August dark.

When the time came to go to bed he got their candles for the two ladies. Rose just touched his hand with cool fingers.

'Good-night, Mr. Langham. You are going in to smoke with Robert, I suppose?'

Her bright eyes seemed to look him through. Their mocking hostility seemed to say to him as plainly as possible: 'Your purgatory is over — go, smoke and be happy!'

'I will go and help him wind up his sermon,' he said, with an attempt at a laugh, and moved away.

Rose went upstairs, and it seemed to her that a Greek brow, and a pair of wavering melancholy eyes, went before her in the darkness, chased along the passages by the light she held. She gained her room, and stood by the window, seized again by that stifling sense of catastrophe, so strange, so undefined. Then she shook it off with an angry laugh, and went to work to see how far her stock of light dresses had suffered by her London dissipations.

CHAPTER XVI

THE next morning after breakfast the rectory party were in the garden — the gentlemen smoking, Catherine and her sister strolling arm-in-arm among the flowers. Catherine's vague terrors of the morning before had all taken to themselves wings. It seemed to her that Rose and Mr. Langham had hardly spoken to each other since she had seen them walking about together. Robert had already made merry over his own alarms, and hers, and she admitted he was in the right. As to her talk with Rose her deep meditative nature was slowly working upon and digesting it. Meanwhile, she was all tenderness to her sister, and there was even a reaction of pity in her heart towards the lonely sceptic who had once been so good to Robert.

Robert was just bethinking himself that it was time to go off to the school, when they were all startled by an unexpected visitor — a short old lady, in a rusty black dress and bonnet, who entered the drive and stood staring at the rectory party, a tiny hand in a black thread glove shading the sun from a pair of wrinkled eyes.

'Mrs. Darcy!' exclaimed Robert to his wife after a moment's perplexity, and they walked quickly to meet her.

Rose and Langham exchanged a few common-places till the others joined them, and then for a while the attention of everybody in the group was held by

SURREY

the squire's sister. She was very small, as thin and light as thistle-down, ill-dressed, and as communicative as a babbling child. The face and all the features were extraordinarily minute, and moreover, blanched and etherealised by age. She had the elfish look of a little withered fairy godmother. And yet through it all it was clear that she was a great lady. There were certain poses and gestures about her, which made her thread gloves and rusty skirts seem a mere whim and masquerade, adopted, perhaps deliberately, from a high-bred love of congruity, to suit the country lanes.

She had come to ask them all to dinner at the Hall on the following evening, and she either brought or devised on the spot the politest messages from the squire to the new rector, which pleased the sensitive Robert and silenced for the moment his various misgivings as to Mr. Wendover's advent. Then she stayed chattering, studying Rose every now and then out of her strange little eyes, restless and glancing as a bird's, which took stock also of the garden, of the flower-beds, of Elsmere's lanky frame, and of Elsmere's handsome friend in the background. She was most odd when she was grateful, and she was grateful for the most unexpected things. She thanked Elsmere effusively for coming to live there, 'sacrificing yourself so nobly to us country folk,' and she thanked him, with an appreciative glance at Langham, for having his clever friends to stay with him. 'The squire will be so pleased. My brother, you know, is very clever; oh yes, frightfully clever!'

And then there was a long sigh, at which Elsmere could hardly keep his countenance.

ROBERT ELSMERE

She thought it particularly considerate of them to have been to see the squire's books. It would make conversation so easy when they came to dinner.

'Though I don't know anything about his books. He does n't like women to talk about books. He says they only pretend — even the clever ones. Except, of course, Madame de Staël. He can only say she was ugly, and I don't deny it. But I have about used up Madame de Staël,' she added, dropping into another sigh as soft and light as a child's.

Robert was charmed with her, and even Langham smiled. And as Mrs. Darcy adored 'clever men,' ranking them, as the London of her youth had ranked them, only second to 'persons of birth,' she stood among them beaming, becoming more and more whimsical and inconsequent, more and more deliciously incalculable, as she expanded. At last she fluttered off, only, however, to come hurrying back, with little, short, scudding steps, to implore them all to come to tea with her as soon as possible in the garden that was her special hobby, and in her last new summer-house.

'I build two or three every summer,' she said. 'Now, there are twenty-one! Roger laughs at me,' and there was a momentary bitterness in the little eerie face, 'but how can one live without hobbies? That's one — then I've two more. My album — oh, you *will* all write in my album, won't you? When I was young — when I was Maid of Honour' — and she drew herself up slightly — 'everybody had albums. Even the dear Queen herself! I remember how she made M. Guizot write in it; something quite stupid,

SURREY

after all. *Those* hobbies — the garden and the album — are *quite* harmless, are n't they? They hurt nobody, do they?' Her voice dropped a little, with a pathetic expostulating intonation in it, as of one accustomed to be rebuked.

'Let me remind you of a saying of Bacon's,' said Langham, studying her, and softened perforce into benevolence.

'Yes, yes,' said Mrs. Darcy in a flutter of curiosity.

'God Almighty first planted a garden,' he quoted; 'and indeed, it is the purest of all human pleasures.'

'Oh, but how *delightful*!' cried Mrs. Darcy, clasping her diminutive hands in their thread gloves. 'You must write that in my album, Mr. Langham, that very sentence; oh, how *clever* of you to remember it! What it is to be clever and have a brain! But, then — I've another hobby —'

Here, however, she stopped, hung her head and looked depressed. Robert, with a little ripple of laughter, begged her to explain.

'No,' she said plaintively, giving a quick uneasy look at him, as though it occurred to her that it might some day be his pastoral duty to admonish her. 'No, it's wrong. I know it is — only I can't help it. Never mind. You'll know soon.'

And again she turned away, when, suddenly, Rose attracted her attention, and she stretched out a thin white bird-claw of a hand and caught the girl's arm.

'There won't be much to amuse you to-morrow, my dear, and there ought to be — you're so pretty!' Rose blushed furiously and tried to draw her hand away. 'No, no! don't mind, don't mind. I did n't at

ROBERT ELSMERE

your age. Well, we'll do our best. But your own party is so *charming*!' and she looked round the little circle, her gaze stopping specially at Langham before it returned to Rose. 'After all, you will amuse each other.'

Was there any malice in the tiny withered creature? Rose, unsympathetic and indifferent as youth commonly is when its own affairs absorb it, had stood coldly outside the group which was making much of the squire's sister. Was it so the strange little visitor revenged herself?

At any rate Rose was left feeling as if some one had pricked her. While Catherine and Elsmere escorted Mrs. Darcy to the gate she turned to go in, her head thrown back stag-like, her cheek still burning. Why should it be always open to the old to annoy the young with impunity?

Langham watched her mount the first step or two; his eye travelled up the slim figure so instinct with pride and will — and something in him suddenly gave way. It was like a man who feels his grip relaxing on some attacking thing he has been holding by the throat.

He followed her hastily.

'Must you go in? And none of us have paid our respects yet to those phloxes in the back garden?'

O woman — flighty woman! An instant before, the girl, sore and bruised in every fibre, she only half-knew why, was thirsting that this man might somehow offer her his neck that she might trample on it. He offers it, and the angry instinct wavers, as a man wavers in a wrestling-match when his opponent un-

SURREY

expectedly gives ground. She paused, she turned her white throat. His eyes upturned met hers.

‘The phloxes, did you say?’ she asked, coolly re-descending the steps. ‘Then round here, please.’

She led the way, he followed, conscious of an utter relaxation of nerve and will which for the moment had something intoxicating in it.

‘There are your phloxes,’ she said, stopping before a splendid line of plants in full blossom. Her self-respect was whole again; her spirits rose at a bound. ‘I don’t know why you admire them so much. They have no scent, and they are only pretty in the lump,’ and she broke off a spike of blossom, studied it a little disdainfully, and threw it away.

He stood beside her, the southern glow and life of which it was intermittently capable once more lighting up the strange face.

‘Give me leave to enjoy everything countrified more than usual,’ he said. ‘After this morning it will be so long before I see the true country again.’

He looked, smiling, round on the blue-and-white brilliance of the sky, clear again after a night of rain; on the sloping garden, on the village beyond, on the hedge of sweet peas close beside them, with its blooms

‘On tiptoe for a flight,
With wings of gentle flush o’er delicate white.’

‘Oh! Oxford is countrified enough,’ she said indifferently, moving down the broad grass path which divided the garden into two equal portions.

‘But I am leaving Oxford, at any rate for a year,’ he said quietly. ‘I am going to London.’

ROBERT ELSMERE

Her delicate eyebrows went up. 'To London?' Then, in a tone of mock meekness and sympathy, 'How you will dislike it!'

'Dislike it — why?'

'Oh! because' — she hesitated, and then laughed her daring girlish laugh — 'because there are so many stupid people in London; the clever people are not all picked out like prize apples, as I suppose they are in Oxford.'

'At Oxford?' repeated Langham, with a kind of groan. 'At Oxford? You imagine that Oxford is inhabited only by clever people?'

'I can only judge by what I see,' she said demurely. 'Every Oxford man always behaves as if he were the cream of the universe. Oh! I don't mean to be rude,' she cried, losing for a moment her defiant control over herself, as though afraid of having gone too far. 'I am not the least disrespectful, really. When you and Robert talk, Catherine and I feel quite as humble as we ought.'

The words were hardly out before she could have bitten the tongue that spoke them. He had made her feel her indiscretions of Sunday night as she deserved to feel them, and now after three minutes' conversation she was on the verge of fresh ones. Would she never grow up, never behave like other girls? That word *humble*! It seemed to burn her memory.

Before he could possibly answer she barred the way by a question as short and dry as possible —

'What are you going to London for?'

'For many reasons,' he said, shrugging his shoulders. 'I have told no one yet — not even Elsmere.'

SURREY

And indeed I go back to my rooms for a while from here. But as soon as Term begins I become a Londoner.'

They had reached the gate at the bottom of the garden, and were leaning against it. She was disturbed, conscious, lightly flushed. It struck her as another *gaucherie* on her part that she should have questioned him as to his plans. What did his life matter to her?

He was looking away from her, studying the half-ruined, degraded manor-house spread out below them. Then suddenly he turned —

'If I could imagine for a moment it would interest you to hear my reasons for leaving Oxford, I could not flatter myself you would see any sense in them. I *know* that Robert will think them moonshine; nay, more, that they will give him pain.'

He smiled sadly. The tone of gentleness, the sudden breach in the man's melancholy reserve affected the girl beside him for the second time, precisely as they had affected her the first time. The result of twenty-four hours' resentful meditation turned out to be precisely *nil*. Her breath came fast, her proud look melted, and his quick sense caught the change in an instant.

'Are you tired of Oxford?' the poor child asked him, almost shyly.

'Mortally!' he said, still smiling. 'And what is more important still, Oxford is tired of me. I have been lecturing there for ten years. They have had more than enough of me.'

'Oh! but Robert said —' began Rose impetuously,

ROBERT ELSMERE

then stopped, crimson, remembering many things Robert had said.

‘That I helped him over a few stiles?’ returned Langham calmly. ‘Yes, there was a time when I was capable of that — there was a time when I could teach, and teach with pleasure.’ He paused. Rose could have scourged herself for the tremor she felt creeping over her. Why should it be to her so new and strange a thing that *a man*, especially a man of these years and this calibre, should confide in her, should speak to her intimately of himself? After all, she said to herself angrily, with a terrified sense of importance, she was a child no longer, though her mother and sisters would treat her as one. ‘When we were chatting the other night,’ he went on, turning to her again as he stood leaning on the gate, ‘do you know what it was struck me most?’

His tone had in it the most delicate, the most friendly deference. But Rose flushed furiously.

‘That girls are very ready to talk about themselves, I imagine,’ she said scornfully.

‘Not at all! Not for a moment! No, but it seemed to me so pathetic, so strange that anybody should wish for anything so much as you wished for the musician’s life.’

‘And you never wish for anything?’ she cried.

‘When Elsmere was at college,’ he said, smiling, ‘I believe I wished he should get a first class. This year I have certainly wished to say good-bye to St. Anselm’s, and to turn my back for good and all on my men. I can’t remember that I have wished for anything else for six years.’

SURREY

She looked at him perplexed. Was his manner merely languid, or was it from him that the emotion she felt invading herself first started? She tried to shake it off.

‘And *I* am just a bundle of wants,’ she said, half-mockingly. ‘Generally speaking I am in the condition of being ready to barter all I have for some folly or other—one in the morning, another in the afternoon. What have you to say to such people, Mr. Langham?’

Her eyes challenged him magnificently, mostly out of sheer nervousness. But the face they rested on seemed suddenly to turn to stone before her. The life died out of it. It grew still and rigid.

‘Nothing,’ he said quietly. ‘Between them and me there is a great gulf fixed. I watch them pass, and I say to myself: “There are *the living* — that is how they look, how they speak! Realise once for all that you have nothing to do with them. Life is theirs — belongs to *them*. You are already outside it. Go your way, and be a spectre among the active and the happy no longer.”’

He leant his back against the gate. Did he see her? Was he conscious of her at all in this rare impulse of speech which had suddenly overtaken one of the most withdrawn and silent of human beings? All her airs dropped off her; a kind of fright seized her; and involuntarily she laid her hand on his arm.

‘Don’t — don’t — Mr. Langham! Oh, don’t say such things! Why should you be so unhappy? Why should you talk so? Can no one do anything? Why do you live so much alone? Is there no one you care about?’

ROBERT ELSMERE

He turned. What a vision! His artistic sense absorbed it in an instant — the beautiful tremulous lip, the drawn white brow. For a moment he drank in the pity, the emotion, of those eyes. Then a movement of such self-scorn as even he had never felt swept through him. He gently moved away; her hand dropped.

‘Miss Leyburn,’ he said, gazing at her, his olive face singularly pale, ‘don’t waste your pity on me, for Heaven’s sake. Some madness made me behave as I did just now. Years ago the same sort of idiocy betrayed me to your brother; never before or since. I ask your pardon, humbly,’ and his tone seemed to scorch her, ‘that this second fit of ranting should have seized me in your presence.’

But he could not keep it up. The inner upheaval had gone too far. He stopped and looked at her — piteously, the features quivering. It was as though the man’s whole nature had for the moment broken up, become disorganised. She could not bear it. Some ghastly infirmity seemed to have been laid bare to her. She held out both her hands. Swiftly he caught them, stooped, kissed them, let them go. It was an extraordinary scene — to both a kind of lifetime.

Then he gathered himself together by a mighty effort.

‘That was *adorable* of you,’ he said with a long breath. ‘But I stole it — I despise myself. Why should you pity me? What is there to pity me for? My troubles, such as I have, are my own making — every one.’

And he laid a sort of vindictive emphasis on the words. The tears of excitement were in her eyes.

SURREY

‘Won’t you let me be your friend?’ she said, trembling, with a kind of reproach. ‘I thought — the other night — we were to be friends. Won’t you tell me —’

‘More of yourself?’ her eyes said, but her voice failed her. And as for him, as he gazed at her, all the accidents of circumstance, of individual character, seemed to drop from her. He forgot the difference of years; he saw her no longer as she was — a girl hardly out of the schoolroom, vain, ambitious, dangerously responsive, on whose crude romantic sense he was wantonly playing; she was to him pure beauty, pure woman. For one tumultuous moment the cold critical instinct which had been for years draining his life of all its natural energies was powerless. It was sweet to yield, to speak, as it had never been sweet before.

So, leaning over the gate, he told her the story of his life, of his cramped childhood and youth, of his brief moment of happiness and success at college, of his first attempts to make himself a power among younger men, of the gradual dismal failure of all his efforts, the dying down of desire and ambition. From the general narrative there stood out little pictures of individual persons or scenes, clear-cut and masterly — of his father, the Gainsborough churchwarden; of his Methodistical mother, who had all her life lamented her own beauty as a special snare of Satan, and who since her husband’s death had refused to see her son on the ground that his opinions ‘had vexed his father’; of his first ardent worship of knowledge, and passion to communicate it; and of the first intuitions in lecture, face to face with an undergraduate, alone in college rooms, sometimes alone on Alpine heights, of

something cold, impotent and baffling in himself, which was to stand for ever between him and action, between him and human affection; the growth of the critical pessimist sense which laid the axe to the root of enthusiasm after enthusiasm, friendship after friendship — which made other men feel him inhuman, intangible, a skeleton at the feast; and the persistence through it all of a kind of hunger for life and its satisfactions, which the will was more and more powerless to satisfy: all these Langham put into words with an extraordinary magic and delicacy of phrase. There was something in him which found a kind of pleasure in the long analysis, which took pains that it should be infinitely well done.

Rose followed him breathlessly. If she had known more of literature she would have realised that she was witnessing a masterly dissection of one of those many morbid growths of which our nineteenth century psychology is full. But she was anything but literary, and she could not analyse her excitement. The man's physical charm, his melancholy, the intensity of what he said, affected, unsteadied her as music was apt to affect her. And through it all there was the strange girlish pride that this should have befallen *her*; a first crude intoxicating sense of the power over human lives which was to be hers, mingled with a desperate anxiety to be equal to the occasion, to play her part well.

'So you see,' said Langham at last, with a great effort (to do him justice) to climb back on to some ordinary level of conversation; 'all these transcendentalisms apart, I am about the most unfit man in the

SURREY

world for a college tutor. The undergraduates regard me as a shilly-shallying pedant. On my part,' he added drily, 'I am not slow to retaliate. Every term I live I find the young man a less interesting animal. I regard the whole university system as a wretched sham. Knowledge! It has no more to do with knowledge than my boots.'

And for one curious instant he looked out over the village, his fastidious scholar's soul absorbed by some intellectual irritation, of which Rose understood absolutely nothing. She stood bewildered, silent, longing childishly to speak, to influence him, but not knowing what cue to take.

'And then' — he went on presently (but was the strange being speaking to her?) — 'so long as I stay there, worrying those about me, and eating my own heart out, I am cut off from the only life that might be mine, that I might find the strength to live.'

The words were low and deliberate. After his moment of passionate speech, and hers of passionate sympathy, she began to feel strangely remote from him.

'Do you mean the life of the student?' she asked him after a pause, timidly.

Her voice recalled him. He turned and smiled at her.

'Of the dreamer, rather.'

And as her eyes still questioned, as he was still moved by the spell of her responsiveness, he let the new wave of feeling break in words. Vaguely at first, and then with a growing flame and force, he fell to describing to her what the life of thought may be to the thinker, and those marvellous moments which belong to that life when the mind which has divorced

ROBERT ELSMERE

itself from desire and sense sees spread out before it the vast realms of knowledge, and feels itself close to the secret springs and sources of being. And as he spoke, his language took an ampler turn, the element of smallness which attaches to all mere personal complaint vanished, his words flowed, became eloquent, inspired, till the bewildered child beside him, warm through and through as she was with youth and passion, felt for an instant by sheer fascinated sympathy the cold spell, the ineffable prestige, of the thinker's voluntary death in life.

But only for an instant. Then the natural sense of chill smote her to the heart.

'You make me shiver,' she cried, interrupting him. 'Have those strange things — I don't understand them — made you happy? Can they make any one happy? Oh no, no! Happiness is to be got from living, seeing, experiencing, making friends, enjoying Nature! Look at the world, Mr. Langham!' she said, with bright cheeks, half-smiling at her own magniloquence, her hand waving over the view before them. 'What has it done that you should hate it so? If you can't put up with people you might love Nature. I — I can't be content with Nature, because I want some life first. Up in Whindale there is too much Nature, not enough life. But if I had got through life — if it had disappointed me — then I should love Nature. I keep saying to the mountains at home: "Not *now*, not *now*; I want something else, but afterwards if I can't get it, or if I get too much of it, why then I will love you, live with you. You are my second string, my reserve. You — and art — and poetry."'

SURREY

‘But everything depends on feeling,’ he said softly, but lightly, as though to keep the conversation from slipping back into those vague depths it had emerged from; ‘and if one has forgotten how to feel — if when one sees or hears something beautiful that used to stir one, one can only say, “I remember it moved me once!” — if feeling dies, like life, like physical force, but prematurely, long before the rest of the man!’

She gave a long quivering sigh of passionate antagonism.

‘Oh, I cannot imagine it!’ she cried. ‘I shall feel to my last hour.’ Then, after a pause, in another tone, ‘But, Mr. Langham, you say music excites you, Wagner excites you?’

‘Yes, a sort of strange second life I can still get out of music,’ he admitted, smiling.

‘Well then,’ and she looked at him persuasively, ‘why not give yourself up to music? It is so easy — so little trouble to one’s self — it just takes you and carries you away.’

Then, for the first time, Langham became conscious — probably through these admonitions of hers — that the situation had absurdity in it.

‘It is not my *métier*,’ he said hastily. ‘The self that enjoys music is an outer self, and can only bear with it for a short time. No, Miss Leyburn, I shall leave Oxford, the College will sing a *Te Deum*, I shall settle down in London, I shall keep a big book going, and cheat the years after all, I suppose, as well as most people.’

‘And you will know, you will remember,’ she said faltering, reddening, her womanliness forcing the words

ROBERT ELSMERE

out of her, 'that you have friends: Robert — my sister — all of us?'

He faced her with a little quick movement. And as their eyes met each was struck once more with the personal beauty of the other. His eyes shone — their black depths seemed all tenderness.

'I will never forget this visit, this garden, this hour,' he said slowly, and they stood looking at each other. Rose felt herself swept off her feet into a world of tragic mysterious emotion. She all but put her hand into his again, asking him childishly to hope, to be consoled. But the maidenly impulse restrained her, and once more he leant on the gate, burying his face in his hands.

Suddenly he felt himself utterly tired, relaxed. Strong nervous reaction set in. What had all this scene, this tragedy, been about? And then in another instant was that sense of the ridiculous again clamouring to be heard. He — the man of thirty-five — confessing himself, making a tragic scene, playing Manfred or Cain to this adorable half-fledged creature, whom he had known five days! Supposing Elsmere had been there to hear — Elsmere with his sane eye, his laugh! As he leant over the gate he found himself quivering with impatience to be away — by himself — out of reach — the critic in him making the most bitter remorseless mock of all these heroics and despairs the other self had been indulging in. But for the life of him he could not find a word to say — a move to make. He stood hesitating, *gauche*, as usual.

'Do you know, Mr. Langham,' said Rose lightly, by his side, 'that there is no time at all left for *you* to give

SURREY

me good advice in? That is an obligation still hanging over you. I don't mean to release you from it, but if I don't go in now and finish the covering of those library books, the youth of Murewell will be left without any literature till Heaven knows when!

He could have blessed her for the tone, for the escape into common mundanity.

'Hang literature — hang the parish library!' he said with a laugh as he moved after her. Yet his real inner feeling towards that parish library was one of infinite friendliness.

'Hear these men of letters!' she said scornfully. But she was happy; there was a glow on her cheek.

A bramble caught her dress; she stopped and laid her white hand to it, but in vain. He knelt in an instant, and between them they wrenched it away, but not till those soft slim fingers had several times felt the neighbourhood of his brown ones, and till there had flown through and through him once more, as she stooped over him, the consciousness that she was young, that she was beautiful, that she had pitied him so sweetly, that they were alone.

'Rose!'

It was Catherine calling — Catherine, who stood at the end of the grass path with eyes all indignation and alarm.

Langham rose quickly from the ground.

He felt as though the gods had saved him — or damned him — which?

CHAPTER XVII

MUREWELL Rectory during the next forty-eight hours was the scene of much that might have been of interest to a psychologist gifted with the power of divining his neighbours.

In the first place Catherine's terrors were all alive again. Robert had never seen her so moved since those days of storm and stress before their engagement.

'I cannot bear it!' she said to Robert at night in their room. 'I cannot bear it! I hear it always in my ears: "What hast thou done with thy sister?" Oh, Robert, don't mind, dear, though he is your friend. My father would have shrunk from him with horror — *An alien from the household of faith! An enemy to the Cross of Christ!*'

She flung out the words with low intense emphasis and frowning brow, standing rigid by the window, her hands locked behind her. Robert stood by her much perplexed, feeling himself a good deal of a culprit, but inwardly conscious that he knew a great deal more about Langham than she did.

'My dear wifie,' he said to her, 'I am certain Langham has no intention of marrying.'

'Then more shame for him,' cried Catherine, flushing. 'They could not have looked more conscious, Robert, when I found them together, if he had just proposed.'

'What, in five days?' said Robert, more than half-

SURREY

inclined to banter his wife. Then he fell into meditation as Catherine made no answer. 'I believe with men of that sort,' he said at last, 'relations to women are never more than half-real — always more or less literature — acting. Langham is tasting an experience, to be bottled up for future use.'

It need hardly be said, however, that Catherine got small consolation out of this point of view. It seemed to her Robert did not take the matter quite rightly.

'After all, darling,' he said at last, kissing her, 'you can act dragon splendidly; you have already — so can I. And you really cannot make me believe in anything very tragic in a week.'

But Catherine was conscious that she had already played the dragon hard, to very little purpose. In the forty hours that intervened between the scene in the garden and the squire's dinner-party, Robert was always wanting to carry off Langham, Catherine was always asking Rose's help in some household business or other. In vain. Langham said to himself calmly, this time, that Elsmere and his wife were making a foolish mistake in supposing that his friendship with Miss Leyburn was anything to be alarmed about, that they would soon be amply convinced of it themselves, and meanwhile he should take his own way. And as for Rose, they had no sooner turned back all three from the house to the garden than she had divined everything in Catherine's mind, and set herself against her sister with a wilful force in which many a past irritation found expression.

How Catherine hated the music of that week! It seemed to her she never opened the drawing-room

ROBERT ELSMERE

door but she saw Langham at the piano, his head with its crown of glossy, curling black hair, and his eyes lit with unwonted gleams of laughter and sympathy, turned towards Rose, who was either chatting wildly to him, mimicking the airs of some professional, or taking off the ways of some famous teacher; or else, which was worse, playing with all her soul, flooding the house with sound — now as soft and delicate as first love, now as full and grand as storm-waves on an angry coast. And the sister going with compressed lip to her work-table would recognise sorely that never had the girl looked so handsome, and never had the lightnings of a wayward genius played so finely about her.

As to Langham, it may well be believed that after the scene in the garden he had rated, satirised, examined himself in the most approved introspective style. One half of him declared that scene to have been the heights of melodramatic absurdity; the other thought of it with a thrill of tender gratitude towards the young pitiful creature who had evoked it. After all, why, because he was alone in the world and must remain so, should he feel bound to refuse this one gift of the gods, the delicate passing gift of a girl's — a child's friendship? As for her, the man's very real, though wholly morbid, modesty scouted the notion of love on her side. *He* was a likely person for a beauty on the threshold of life and success to fall in love with; but she meant to be kind to him, and he smiled a little inward indulgent smile over her very evident compassion, her very evident intention of reforming him, reconciling him to life. And, finally, he was incapable

SURREY

of any further resistance. He had gone too far with her. Let her do what she would with him, dear child, with the sharp tongue and the soft heart, and the touch of genius and brilliancy which made her future so interesting! He called his age and his disillusion to the rescue; he posed to himself as stooping to her in some sort of elder-brotherly fashion; and if every now and then some disturbing memory of that strange scene between them would come to make his present rôle less plausible, or some whim of hers made it difficult to play, why then at bottom there was always the consciousness that sixty hours, or thereabouts, would see him safely settled in that morning train to London. Throughout it is probable that that morning train occupied the saving background of his thoughts.

The two days passed by, and the squire's dinner-party arrived. About seven on the Thursday evening a party of four might have been seen hurrying across the park — Langham and Catherine in front, Elsmere and Rose behind. Catherine had arranged it so, and Langham, who understood perfectly that his friendship with her young sister was not at all to Mrs. Elsmere's taste, and who had by now taken as much of a dislike to her as his nature was capable of, was certainly doing nothing to make his walk with her otherwise than difficult. And every now and then some languid epigram would bring Catherine's eyes on him with a fiery gleam in their grey depths. Oh, fourteen more hours and she would have shut the rectory gate on this most unwelcome of intruders! She had never felt so vindictively anxious to see the last of any one in her life. There was in her a vehemence of antagonism

to the man's manner, his pessimism, his infidelity, his very ways of speaking and looking, which astonished even herself.

Robert's eager soul meanwhile, for once irresponsible to Catherine's, was full of nothing but the squire. At last the moment was come, and that dumb spiritual friendship he had formed through these long months with the philosopher and the *savant* was to be tested by sight and speech of the man. He bade himself a hundred times pitch his expectations low. But curiosity and hope were keen, in spite of everything.

Ah, those parish worries! Robert caught the smoke of Mile End in the distance, curling above the twilight woods, and laid about him vigorously with his stick on the squire's shrubs, as he thought of those poisonous hovels, those ruined lives! But, after all, it might be mere ignorance, and that wretch Henslowe might have been merely trading on his master's morbid love of solitude.

And then — all men have their natural conceits. Robert Elsmere would not have been the very human creature he was if, half-consciously, he had not counted a good deal on his own powers of influence. Life had been to him so far one long social success of the best kind. Very likely as he walked on to the great house over whose threshold lay the answer to the enigma of months, his mind gradually filled with some naïve young dream of winning the squire, playing him with all sorts of honest arts, beguiling him back to life — to his kind.

Those friendly messages of his through Mrs. Darcy had been very pleasant.

SURREY

‘I wonder whether my Oxford friends have been doing me a good turn with the squire,’ he said to Rose, laughing. ‘He knows the Provost, of course. If they talked me over it is to be hoped my scholarship did n’t come up. Precious little the Provost used to think of my abilities for Greek prose!’

Rose yawned a little behind her gloved hand. Robert had already talked a good deal about the squire, and he was certainly the only person in the group who was thinking of him. Even Catherine, absorbed in other anxieties, had forgotten to feel any thrill at their approaching introduction to the man who must of necessity mean so much to herself and Robert.

‘Mr. and Mrs. Robert Elsmere,’ said the butler, throwing open the carved and gilded doors.

Catherine — following her husband, her fine grave head and beautiful neck held a little more erect than usual — was at first conscious of nothing but the dazzle of western light which flooded the room, striking the stands of Japanese lilies, and the white figure of a clown in the famous Watteau opposite the window.

Then she found herself greeted by Mrs. Darcy, whose odd habit of holding her lace handkerchief in her right hand on festive occasions only left her two fingers for her guests. The mistress of the Hall — as diminutive and elf-like as ever in spite of the added dignity of her sweeping silk and the draperies of black lace with which her tiny head was adorned — kept tight hold of Catherine, and called a gentleman standing in a group just behind her.

‘Roger, here are Mr. and Mrs. Robert Elsmere. Mr.

ROBERT ELSMERE

Elsmere, the squire remembers you in petticoats, and I'm not sure that I don't too.'

Robert, smiling, looked beyond her to the advancing figure of the squire, but if Mr. Wendover heard his sister's remark he took no notice of it. He held out his hand stiffly to Robert, bowed to Catherine and Rose before extending to them the same formal greeting, and just recognised Langham as having met him at Oxford.

Having done so he turned back to the knot of people with whom he had been engaged on their entrance. His manner had been reserve itself. The *hauteur* of the grandee on his own ground was clearly marked in it, and Robert could not help fancying that towards himself there had even been something more. And not one of those phrases which, under the circumstances, would have been so easy and so gracious, as to Robert's childish connexion with the place, or as to the squire's remembrance of his father, even though Mrs. Darcy had given him a special opening of the kind.

The young rector instinctively drew himself together, like one who has received a blow, as he moved across to the other side of the fireplace to shake hands with the worthy family doctor, old Meyrick, who was already well known to him. Catherine, in some discomfort, for she too had felt their reception at the squire's hands to be a chilling one, sat down to talk to Mrs. Darcy, disagreeably conscious the while that Rose and Langham left to themselves were practically *tête-à-tête*, and that, moreover, a large stand of flowers formed a partial screen between her and them.

SURREY

She could see, however, the gleam of Rose's upstretched neck, as Langham, who was leaning on the piano beside her, bent down to talk to her; and when she looked next she caught a smiling motion of Langham's head and eyes towards the Romney portrait of Mr. Wendover's grandmother, and was certain, when he stooped afterwards to say something to his companion, that he was commenting on a certain surface likeness there was between her and the young auburn-haired beauty of the picture. Hateful! And they would be sent down to dinner together to a certainty.

The other guests were Lady Charlotte Wynnstay, a cousin of the squire — a tall, imperious, loud-voiced woman, famous in London society for her relationships, her audacity, and the *salon* which in one way or another she managed to collect round her; her dark, thin, irritable-looking husband; two neighbouring clerics — the first, by name Longstaffe, a somewhat inferior specimen of the cloth, whom Robert cordially disliked; and the other, Mr. Bickerton, a gentle Evangelical, one of those men who help to ease the harshness of a cross-grained world, and to reconcile the cleverer or more impatient folk in it to the worries of living.

Lady Charlotte was already known by name to the Elsmere as the aunt of one of their chief friends of the neighbourhood — the wife of a neighbouring squire whose property joined that of Murewell Hall, one Lady Helen Varley, of whom more presently. Lady Charlotte was the sister of the Duke of Sedburgh, one of the greatest of dukes, and the sister also of Lady Helen's mother, Lady Wanless. Lady Wanless had died prematurely, and her two younger

ROBERT ELSMERE

children, Helen and Hugh Flaxman, creatures both of them of unusually fine and fiery quality, had owed a great deal to their aunt. There were family alliances between the Sedberghs and the Wendovers, and Lady Charlotte made a point of keeping up with the squire. She adored cynics and people who said piquant things, and it amused her to make her large tyrannous hand felt by the squire's timid, crack-brained, ridiculous little sister.

As to Dr. Meyrick, he was tall and gaunt as Don Quixote. His grey hair made a ragged fringe round his straight-backed head; he wore an old-fashioned neck-cloth; his long body had a perpetual stoop, as though of deference, and his spectacled look of mild attentiveness had nothing in common with that medical self-assurance with which we are all nowadays so familiar. Robert noticed presently that when he addressed Mrs. Darcy he said 'Ma'am,' making no bones at all about it; and his manner generally was the manner of one to whom class distinctions were the profoundest reality, and no burden at all on a naturally humble temper. Dr. Baker, of Whindale, accustomed to trouncing Mrs. Seaton, would have thought him a poor creature.

When dinner was announced, Robert found himself assigned to Mrs. Darcy; the squire took Lady Charlotte. Catherine fell to Mr. Bickerton, Rose to Mr. Wynnstay, and the rest found their way in as best they could. Catherine seeing the distribution was happy for a moment, till she found that if Rose was covered on her right she was exposed to the full fire of the enemy on her left, in other words

SURREY

that Langham was placed between her and Dr. Meyrick.

‘Are your spirits damped at all by this magnificence?’ Langham said to his neighbour as they sat down. The table was entirely covered with Japanese lilies, save for the splendid silver candelabra from which the light flashed, first on to the faces of the guests, and then on to those of the family portraits, hung thickly round the room. A roof embossed with gilded Tudor roses on a ground of black oak hung above them; a rose-water dish in which the Merry Monarch had once dipped his hands, and which bore a record of the fact in the inscription on its sides, stood before them; and the servants were distributing to each guest silver soup-plates which had been the gift of Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough, in some moment of generosity or calculation, to the Wendover of her day.

‘Oh dear, no!’ said Rose carelessly. ‘I don’t know how it is, I think I must have been born for a palace.’

Langham looked at her, at the daring harmony of colour made by the reddish gold of her hair, the warm whiteness of her skin, and the brown-pink tints of her dress, at the crystals playing the part of diamonds on her beautiful neck, and remembered Robert’s remarks to him. The same irony mingled with the same bitterness returned to him, and the elder brother’s attitude became once more temporarily difficult. ‘Who is your neighbour?’ he inquired of her presently.

‘Lady Charlotte’s husband,’ she answered mischievously, under her breath. ‘One need n’t know much more about him, I imagine!’

ROBERT ELSMERE

‘And that man opposite?’

‘Robert’s pet aversion,’ she said calmly, without a change of countenance, so that Mr. Longstaffe opposite, who was studying her as he always studied pretty young women, stared at her through her remark in sublime ignorance of its bearing.

‘And your sister’s neighbour?’

‘I can’t hit him off in a sentence, he’s too good!’ said Rose, laughing; ‘all I can say is that Mrs. Bickerton has too many children, and the children have too many ailments for her ever to dine out.’

‘That will do; I see the existence,’ said Langham, with a shrug. ‘But he has the look of an apostle, though a rather hunted one. Probably nobody here, except Robert, is fit to tie his shoes.’

‘The squire could hardly be called *empressé*,’ said Rose, after a second, with a curl of her red lips. Mr. Wynnstay was still safely engaged with Mrs. Darcy, and there was a buzz of talk largely sustained by Lady Charlotte.

‘No,’ Langham admitted; ‘the manners I thought were not quite equal to the house.’

‘What possible reason could he have for treating Robert with those airs?’ said Rose indignantly, ready enough in girl fashion to defend her belongings against the outer world. ‘He ought to be only too glad to have the opportunity of knowing him and making friends with him.’

‘You are a sister worth having’; and Langham smiled at her as she leant back in her chair, her white arms and wrists lying on her lap, and her slightly flushed face turned towards him. They had been on

SURREY

these pleasant terms of *camaraderie* all day, and the intimacy between them had been still making strides.

‘Do you imagine I don’t appreciate Robert because I make bad jokes about the choir and the clothing club?’ she asked him, with a little quick repentance passing like a shadow through her eyes. ‘I always feel I play an odious part here. I can’t like it — I can’t — their life. I should hate it! And yet —’

She sighed remorsefully, and Langham, who five minutes before could have wished her to be always smiling, could now have almost asked to fix her as she was: the eyes veiled, the soft lips relaxed in this passing instant of gravity.

‘Ah! I forgot’ — and she looked up again with light bewitching appeal — ‘there is still that question, my poor little question of Sunday night, when I was in that fine moral frame of mind and you were near giving me, I believe, the only good advice you ever gave in your life — how shamefully you have treated it!’

One brilliant look, which Catherine for her torment caught from the other side of the table, and then in an instant the quick face changed and stiffened. Mr. Wynnstay was speaking to her, and Langham was left to the intermittent mercies of Dr. Meyrick, who though glad to talk, was also quite content, apparently, to judge from the radiant placidity of his look, to examine his wine, study his *menu*, and enjoy his *entrées* in silence, undisturbed by the uncertain pleasures of conversation.

Robert, meanwhile, during the first few minutes, in which Mr. Wynnstay had been engaged in some

ROBERT ELSMERE

family talk with Mrs. Darcy, had been allowing himself a little deliberate study of Mr. Wendover across what seemed the safe distance of a long table. The squire was talking shortly and abruptly, yet with occasional flashes of shrill ungainly laughter, to Lady Charlotte, who seemed to have no sort of fear of him and to find him good company, and every now and then Robert saw him turn to Catherine on the other side of him, and with an obvious change of manner address some formal and constrained remark to her.

Mr. Wendover was a man of middle height and loose bony frame, of which, as Robert had noticed in the drawing-room, all the lower half had a thin and shrunken look. But the shoulders, which had the scholar's stoop, and the head were massive and squarely outlined. The head was specially remarkable for its great breadth and comparative flatness above the eyes, and for the way in which the head itself dwarfed the face, which, as contrasted with the large angularity of the skull, was somewhat pinched and drawn. The hair was reddish-grey, the eyes small, but deep-set under fine brows, and the thin-lipped wrinkled mouth and long chin produced an effect of hard sarcastic strength.

Generally the countenance was that of an old man, the furrows were deep, the skin brown and shrivelled. But the alertness and force of the man's whole expression showed that, if the body was beginning to fail, the mind was as fresh and masterful as ever. His hair, worn rather longer than usual, his loosely-fitting dress and slouching carriage gave him an un-English look. In general he impressed Robert as a sort of

SURREY

curious combination of the foreign *savant* with the English grandee, for while his manner showed a considerable consciousness of birth and social importance, the gulf between him and the ordinary English country gentleman could hardly have been greater, whether in points of appearance or, as Robert very well knew, in points of social conduct. And as Robert watched him, his thoughts flew back again to the library, to this man's past, to all that those eyes had seen and those hands had touched. He felt already a mysterious, almost a yearning, sense of acquaintance with the being who had just received him with such chilling, such unexpected, indifference.

The squire's manners, no doubt, were notorious, but even so, his reception of the new rector of the parish, the son of a man intimately connected for years with the place, and with his father, and to whom he had himself shown what was for him considerable civility by letter and message, was sufficiently startling.

Robert, however, had no time to speculate on the causes of it, for Mrs. Darcy, released from Mr. Wynnstay, threw herself with glee on to her longed-for prey, the young and interesting-looking rector. First of all she cross-examined him as to his literary employments, and when by dint of much questioning she had forced particulars from him, Robert's mouth twitched as he watched her scuttling away from the subject, seized evidently with internal terrors lest she should have precipitated herself beyond hope of rescue into the jaws of the sixth century. Then with a view to regaining the lead and opening another and more pro-

ROBERT ELSMERE

mising vein, she asked him his opinion of Lady Selden's last novel, 'Love in a Marsh'; and when he confessed ignorance she paused a moment, fork in hand, her small wrinkled face looking almost as bewildered as when, three minutes before, her rashness had well-nigh brought her face to face with Gregory of Tours as a topic of conversation.

But she was not daunted long. With little airs and bridlings infinitely diverting, she exchanged inquiry for the most beguiling confidence. She could appreciate 'clever men,' she said, for she — she too — was literary. Did Mr. Elsmere know — this in a hurried whisper, with sidelong glances to see that Mr. Wynnstay was safely occupied with Rose, and the squire with Lady Charlotte — that she had once *written a novel*?

Robert, who had been posted up in many things concerning the neighbourhood by Lady Helen Varley, could answer most truly that he did. Whereupon Mrs. Darcy beamed all over.

'Ah! but you have n't read it,' she said regretfully. 'It was when I was Maid of Honour, you know. No Maid of Honour had ever written a novel before. It was quite an event. Dear Prince Albert borrowed a copy of me one night to read in bed — I have it still, with the page turned down where he left off.' She hesitated. 'It was only in the second chapter,' she said at last with a fine truthfulness, 'but you know he was so busy, all the Queen's work to do, of course, besides his own — poor man!'

Robert implored her to lend him the work, and Mrs. Darcy, with blushes which made her more weird than ever, consented.

SURREY

Then there was a pause, filled by an acid altercation between Lady Charlotte and her husband, who had not found Rose as grateful for his attentions as, in his opinion, a pink-and-white nobody at a country dinner-party ought to be, and was glad of the diversion afforded him by some aggressive remark of his wife. He and she differed on three main points — politics; the decoration of their London house, Mr. Wynnstay being a lover of Louis Quinze, and Lady Charlotte a preacher of Morris; and the composition of their dinner-parties. Lady Charlotte, in the pursuit of amusement and notoriety, was fond of flooding the domestic hearth with all the people possessed of any sort of a name for any sort of a reason in London. Mr. Wynnstay loathed such promiscuity; and the company in which his wife compelled him to drink his wine had seriously soured a small irritable Conservative with more family pride than either nerves or digestion.

During the whole passage of arms, Mrs. Darcy watched Elsmere, cat-and-mouse fashion, with a further confidence burning within her, and as soon as there was once more a general burst of talk, she pounced upon him afresh. Would he like to know that after thirty years she had just finished her *second* novel, unbeknown to her brother — as she mentioned him the little face darkened, took a strange bitterness — and it was just about to be entrusted to the post and a publisher?

Robert was all interest, of course, and inquired the subject. Mrs. Darcy expanded still more — could, in fact, have hugged him. But, just as she was launch-

ROBERT ELSMERE

ing into the plot a thought, apparently a scruple of conscience, struck her.

‘Do you remember,’ she began, looking at him a little darkly, askance, ‘what I said about my hobbies the other day? Now, Mr. Elsmere, will you tell me — don’t mind me — don’t be polite — have you ever heard people tell stories of me? Have you ever, for instance, heard them call me a — a — tuft-hunter?’

‘Never!’ said Robert heartily.

‘They might,’ she said, sighing. ‘I *am* a tuft-hunter. I can’t help it. And yet we *are* a good family, you know. I suppose it was that year at Court, and that horrid Warham afterwards. Twenty years in a cathedral town — and a very *little* cathedral town, after Windsor, and Buckingham Palace, and dear Lord Melbourne! Every year I came up to town to stay with my father for a month in the season, and if it had n’t been for that I should have died — my husband knew I should. It was the world, the flesh, and the devil, of course, but it could n’t be helped. But now,’ and she looked plaintively at her companion, as though challenging him to a candid reply: ‘You *would* be more interesting, would n’t you, to tell the truth, if you had a handle to your name?’

‘Immeasurably,’ cried Robert, stifling his laughter with immense difficulty, as he saw she had no inclination to laugh.

‘Well, yes, you know. But it is n’t right’; and again she sighed. ‘And so I have been writing this novel just for that. It is called — what do you think? — “Mr. Jones.” Mr. Jones is my hero — it’s so good for me, you know, to think about a Mr. Jones.’

SURREY

She looked beamingly at him. 'It must be indeed! Have you endowed him with every virtue?'

'Oh yes, and in the end, you know' — and she bent forward eagerly — 'it all comes right. His father did n't die in Brazil without children after all, and the title —'

'What!' cried Robert, 'so he *was* n't Mr. Jones?'

Mrs. Darcy looked a little conscious.

'Well, no,' she said guiltily, 'not just at the end. But it *really* does n't matter — not to the story.'

Robert shook his head, with a look of protest as admonitory as he could make it, which evoked in her an answering expression of anxiety. But just at that moment a loud wave of conversation and of laughter seemed to sweep down upon them from the other end of the table, and their little private eddy was effaced. The squire had been telling an anecdote, and his clerical neighbours had been laughing at it.

'Ah!' cried Mr. Longstaffe, throwing himself back in his chair with a chuckle, 'that was an Archbishop worth having!'

'A curious story,' said Mr. Bickerton, benevolently, the point of it, however, to tell the truth, not being altogether clear to him. It seemed to Robert that the squire's keen eye, as he sat looking down the table, with his large nervous hands clasped before him, was specially fixed upon himself.

'May we hear the story?' he said, bending forward. Catherine, faintly smiling in her corner beside the host, was looking a little flushed and moved out of her ordinary quiet.

'It is a story of Archbishop Manners Sutton,' said

ROBERT ELSMERE

Mr. Wendover, in his dry nasal voice. 'You probably know it, Mr. Elsmere. After Bishop Heber's consecration to the See of Calcutta, it fell to the Archbishop to make a valedictory speech, in the course of the luncheon at Lambeth which followed the ceremony. "I have very little advice to give you as to your future career," he said to the young bishop, "but all that experience has given me I hand on to you. Place before your eyes two precepts, and two only. One is, Preach the Gospel; and the other is — *Put down enthusiasm!*"'

There was a sudden gleam of steely animation in the squire's look as he told his story, his eye all the while fixed on Robert. Robert divined in a moment that the story had been re-told for his special benefit, and that in some unexplained way the relations between him and the squire were already biassed. He smiled a little with faint politeness, and falling back into his place made no comment on the squire's anecdote. Lady Charlotte's eye-glass, having adjusted itself for a moment to the distant figure of the rector, with regard to whom she had been asking Dr. Meyrick for particulars, quite unmindful of Catherine's neighbourhood, turned back again towards the squire.

'An unblushing old worldling, I should call your Archbishop,' she said briskly. 'And a very good thing for him that he lived when he did. Our modern good people would have dusted his apron for him.'

Lady Charlotte prided herself on these vigorous forms of speech, and the squire's neighbourhood generally called out an unusual crop of them. The squire was still sitting with his hands on the table, his great brows bent, surveying his guests.

SURREY

‘Oh, of course all the sensible men are dead!’ he said indifferently. ‘But that is a pet saying of mine — the Church of England in a nutshell.’

Robert flushed, and after a moment’s hesitation bent forward.

‘What do you suppose,’ he asked quietly, ‘your Archbishop meant, Mr. Wendover, by enthusiasm? Nonconformity, I imagine.’

‘Oh, very possibly!’ and again Robert found the hawk-like glance concentrated on himself. ‘But I like to give his remark a much wider extension. One may make it a maxim of general experience, and take it as fitting all the fools with a mission who have teased our generation — all your Kingsleys, and Maurices, and Ruskins — every one bent upon making any sort of aimless commotion, which may serve him both as an investment for the next world, and an advertisement for this.’

‘Upon my word, Squire,’ said Lady Charlotte, ‘I hope you don’t expect Mr. Elsmere to agree with you?’

Mr. Wendover made her a little bow.

‘I have very little sanguineness of any sort in my composition,’ he said drily.

‘I should like to know,’ said Robert, taking no notice of this by-play; ‘I should like to know, Mr. Wendover, leaving the Archbishop out of count, what *you* understand by this word enthusiasm in this maxim of yours?’

‘An excellent manner,’ thought Lady Charlotte, who, for all her noisiness, was an extremely shrewd woman, ‘an excellent manner and an unprovoked attack.’

ROBERT ELSMERE

Catherine's trained eye, however, had detected signs in Robert's look and bearing which were lost on Lady Charlotte, and which made her look nervously on. As to the rest of the table, they had all fallen to watching the 'break' between the new rector and their host with a good deal of curiosity.

The squire paused a moment before replying, —

'It is not easy to put it tersely,' he said at last; 'but I may define it, perhaps, as the mania for mending the roof of your right-hand neighbour with straw torn off the roof of your left-hand neighbour; the custom, in short, of robbing Peter to propitiate Paul.'

'Precisely,' said Mr. Wynnstay, warmly; 'all the ridiculous Radical nostrums of the last fifty years — you have hit them off exactly. Sometimes you rob more and propitiate less; sometimes you rob less and propitiate more. But the principle is always the same.' And mindful of all those intolerable evenings, when these same Radical nostrums had been forced down his throat at his own table, he threw a pugnacious look at his wife, who smiled back serenely in reply. There is small redress indeed for these things, when out of the common household stock the wife possesses most of the money, and a vast proportion of the brains.

'And the cynic takes pleasure in observing,' interrupted the squire, 'that the man who effects the change of balance does it in the loftiest manner, and profits in the vulgarest way. Other trades may fail. The agitator is always sure of *his* market.'

He spoke with a harsh contemptuous insistence which was gradually setting every nerve in Robert's body tingling. He bent forward again, his long thin

SURREY

frame and boyish bright-complexioned face making an effective contrast to the squire's bronzed and wrinkled squareness.

'Oh, if you and Mr. Wynnstay are prepared to draw an indictment against your generation and all its works, I have no more to say,' he said, smiling still, though his voice had risen a little in spite of himself. 'I should be content to withdraw with my Burke into the majority. I imagined your attack on enthusiasm had a narrower scope, but if it is to be made synonymous with social progress, I give up. The subject is too big. Only —'

He hesitated. Mr. Wynnstay was studying him with somewhat insolent coolness; Lady Charlotte's eye-glass never wavered from his face, and he felt through every fibre the tender timid admonitions of his wife's eyes.

'However,' he went on after an instant, 'I imagine that we should find it difficult anyhow to discover common ground. I regard your Archbishop's maxim, Mr. Wendover,' and his tone quickened and grew louder, 'as first of all a contradiction in terms; and in the next place, to me, almost all enthusiasms are respectable!'

'You are one of those people, I see,' returned Mr. Wendover, after a pause, with the same nasal emphasis and the same *hauteur*, 'who imagine we owe civilisation to the heart; that mankind has *felt* its way — literally. The school of the majority, of course — I admit it amply. I, on the other hand, am with the benighted minority who believe that the world, so far as it has lived to any purpose, has lived by the *head*,'

ROBERT ELSMERE

and he flung the noun at Robert scornfully. 'But I am quite aware that in a world of claptrap the philosopher gets all the kicks, and the philanthropists, to give them their own label, all the halfpence.'

The impassive tone had gradually warmed to a heat which was unmistakeable. Lady Charlotte looked on with increasing relish. To her all society was a comedy played for her entertainment, and she detected something more dramatic than usual in the juxtaposition of these two men. That young rector might be worth looking after. The dinners in Martin Street were alarmingly in want of fresh blood. As for poor Mr. Bickerton, he had begun to talk hastily to Catherine, with a sense of something tumbling about his ears; while Mr. Longstaffe, eye-glass in hand, surveyed the table with a distinct sense of pleasurable entertainment. He had not seen much of Elsmere yet, but it was as clear as daylight that the man was a fire-brand, and should be kept in order.

Meanwhile there was a pause between the two main disputants; the storm-clouds were deepening outside, and rain had begun to patter on the windows. Mrs. Darcy was just calling attention to the weather when the squire unexpectedly returned to the charge.

'The one necessary thing in life,' he said, turning to Lady Charlotte, a slight irritating smile playing round his strong mouth, 'is — not to be duped. Put too much faith in these fine things the altruists talk of, and you arrive one day at the condition of Louis XIV after the battle of Ramillies: "Dieu a donc oublié tout ce que j'ai fait pour lui?" Read your Renan; remind yourself at every turn that it is quite possible

SURREY

after all the egotist *may* turn out to be in the right of it, and you will find at any rate that the world gets on excellently well without your blundering efforts to set it straight. And so we get back to the Archbishop's maxim — adapted, no doubt, to English requirements,' and he shrugged his great shoulders expressively: '*Pace* Mr. Elsmere, of course, and the rest of our clerical friends!'

Again he looked down the table, and the strident voice sounded harsher than ever as it rose above the sudden noise of the storm outside. Robert's bright eyes were fixed on the squire, and before Mr. Wendover stopped, Catherine could see the words of reply trembling on his lips.

'I am well content,' he said, with a curious dry intensity of tone. 'I give you your Renan. Only leave us poor dupes our illusions. We will not quarrel with the division. With you all the cynics of history; with us all the "scorners of the ground" from the world's beginning until now!'

The squire made a quick impatient movement. Mr. Wynnstay looked significantly at his wife, who dropped her eye-glass with a little irrepressible smile.

As for Robert, leaning forward with hastened breath, it seemed to him that his eyes and the squire's crossed like swords. In Robert's mind there had arisen a sudden passion of antagonism. Before his eyes there was a vision of a child in a stifling room, struggling with mortal disease, imposed upon her, as he hotly reminded himself, by this man's culpable neglect. The dinner-party, the splendour of the room, the conversation, excited a kind of disgust in him. If it were not for

ROBERT ELSMERE

Catherine's pale face opposite, he could hardly have maintained his self-control.

Mrs. Darcy, a little bewildered, and feeling that things were not going particularly well, thought it best to interfere.

'Roger,' she said plaintively, 'you must not be so philosophical. It's too hot! He used to talk like that,' she went on, bending over to Mr. Wynnstay, 'to the French priests who came to see us last winter in Paris. They never minded a bit — they used to laugh. "*Monsieur votre frère, madame, c'est un homme qui a trop lu,*" they would say to me when I gave them their coffee. Oh, they were such dears, those old priests! Roger said they had great hopes of me.'

The chatter was welcome, the conversation broke up. The squire turned to Lady Charlotte, and Rose to Langham.

'Why did n't you support Robert?' she said to him, impulsively, with a dissatisfied face. 'He was alone, against the table!'

'What good should I have done him?' he asked, with a shrug. 'And pray, my lady confessor, what enthusiasms do you suspect me of?'

He looked at her intently. It seemed to her they were by the gate again — the touch of his lips on her hand. She turned from him hastily to stoop for her fan which had slipped away. It was only Catherine who, for her annoyance, saw the scarlet flush leap into the fair face. An instant later Mrs. Darcy had given the signal.

CHAPTER XVIII

AFTER dinner Lady Charlotte fixed herself at first on Catherine, whose quiet dignity during the somewhat trying ordeal of the dinner had impressed her, but a few minutes' talk produced in her the conviction that without a good deal of pains — and why should a Londoner, accustomed to the cream of things, take pains with a country clergyman's wife? — she was not likely to get much out of her. Her appearance promised more, Lady Charlotte thought, than her conversation justified, and she looked about for easier game.

'Are you Mr. Elsmere's sister?' said a loud voice over Rose's head; and Rose, who had been turning over an illustrated book, with a mind wholly detached from it, looked up to see Lady Charlotte's massive form standing over her.

'No, his sister-in-law,' said Rose, flushing in spite of herself, for Lady Charlotte was distinctly formidable.

'Hum,' said her questioner, depositing herself beside her. 'I never saw two sisters more unlike. You have got a very argumentative brother-in-law.'

Rose said nothing, partly from awkwardness, partly from rising antagonism.

'Did you agree with him?' asked Lady Charlotte, putting up her glass and remorselessly studying every detail of the pink dress, its ornaments, and the slippered feet peeping out beneath it.

'Entirely,' said Rose fearlessly, looking her full in the face.

'And what can you know about it, I wonder? However, you are on the right side. It is the fashion nowadays to have enthusiasms. I suppose you muddle about among the poor like other people?'

'I know nothing about the poor,' said Rose.

'Oh, then, I suppose you feel yourself effective enough in some other line?' said the other coolly. 'What is it — lawn tennis, or private theatricals, or — hem — prettiness?' And again the eye-glass went up.

'Whichever you like,' said Rose calmly, the scarlet on her cheek deepening, while she resolutely reopened her book. The manner of the other had quite effaced in her all that sense of obligation, as from the young to the old, which she had been very carefully brought up in. Never had she beheld such an extraordinary woman.

'Don't read,' said Lady Charlotte complacently. 'Look at me. It's your duty to talk to me, you know; and I won't make myself any more disagreeable than I can help. I generally make myself disagreeable, and yet, after all, there are a great many people who like me.'

Rose turned a countenance rippling with suppressed laughter on her companion. Lady Charlotte had a large fair face, with a great deal of nose and chin, and an erection of lace and feathers on her head that seemed in excellent keeping with the masterful emphasis of those features. Her eyes stared frankly and unblushingly at the world, only softened at intervals

SURREY

by the glasses which were so used as to make them a most effective adjunct of her conversation. Socially, she was absolutely devoid of weakness or of shame. She found society extremely interesting, and she always struck straight for the desirable things in it, making short work of all those delicate tentative processes of acquaintanceship by which men and women ordinarily sort themselves. Rose's brilliant vivacious beauty had caught her eye at dinner; she adored beauty as she adored anything effective, and she always took a queer pleasure in bullying her way into a girl's liking. It is a great thing to be persuaded that at bottom you have a good heart. Lady Charlotte was so persuaded, and allowed herself many things in consequence.

'What shall we talk about?' said Rose demurely. 'What a magnificent old house this is!'

'Stuff and nonsense! I don't want to talk about the house. I am sick to death of it. And if your people live in the parish, you are too. I return to my question. Come, tell me, what is your particular line in life? I am sure you have one, by your face. You had better tell me; it will do you no harm.'

Lady Charlotte settled herself comfortably on the sofa, and Rose, seeing that there was no chance of escaping her tormentor, felt her spirits rise to an encounter.

'Really — Lady Charlotte' — and she looked down, and then up, with a feigned bashfulness — 'I — I — play a little.'

'Humph!' said her questioner again, rather disconcerted by the obvious missishness of the answer. 'You

ROBERT ELSMERE

do, do you? More's the pity. No woman who respects herself ought to play the piano nowadays. A professional told me the other day that until nineteen twentieths of the profession were strung up, there would be no chance for the rest; and as for amateurs, there is simply *no* room for them whatever. I can't conceive anything more *passé* than amateur pianoforte playing!

'I don't play the piano,' said Rose meekly.

'What — the fashionable instrument, the banjo?' laughed Lady Charlotte. 'That would be really striking.'

Rose was silent again, the corners of her mouth twitching.

'Mrs. Darcy,' said her neighbour, raising her voice, 'this young lady tells me she plays something; what is it?'

Mrs. Darcy looked in a rather helpless way at Catherine. She was dreadfully afraid of Lady Charlotte.

Catherine, with a curious reluctance, gave the required information; and then Lady Charlotte insisted that the violin should be sent for, as it had not been brought.

'Who accompanies you?' she inquired of Rose.

'Mr. Langham plays very well,' said Rose indifferently.

Lady Charlotte raised her eyebrows. 'That dark, Byronic-looking creature who came with you? I should not have imagined him capable of anything sociable. Letitia, shall I send my maid to the rectory, or can you spare a man?'

Mrs. Darcy hurriedly gave orders, and Rose, in-

SURREY

wardly furious, was obliged to submit. Then Lady Charlotte, having gained her point, and secured a certain amount of diversion for the evening, lay back on the sofa, used her fan, and yawned till the gentlemen appeared.

When they came in, the precious violin which Rose never trusted to any other hands but her own without trepidation had just arrived, and its owner, more erect than usual, because more nervous, was trying to prop up a dilapidated music-stand which Mrs. Darcy had unearthed for her. As Langham came in, she looked up and beckoned to him.

‘Do you see?’ she said to him impatiently, ‘they have made me play. Will you accompany me? I am very sorry, but there is no one else.’

If there was one thing Langham loathed on his own account, it was any sort of performance in public. But the half-plaintive look which accompanied her last words showed that she knew it, and he did his best to be amiable.

‘I am altogether at your service,’ he said, sitting down with resignation.

‘It is all that tiresome woman, Lady Charlotte Wynnstay,’ she whispered to him behind the music-stand. ‘I never saw such a person in my life.’

‘Macaulay’s Lady Holland without the brains,’ suggested Langham with languid vindictiveness as he gave her the note.

Meanwhile Mr. Wynnstay and the squire sauntered in together.

‘A village Norman-Néruda?’ whispered the guest to the host. The squire shrugged his shoulders.

‘Hush!’ said Lady Charlotte, looking severely at her husband. Mr. Wynnstay’s smile instantly disappeared; he leant against the doorway and stared sulkily at the ceiling.

Then the musicians began, on some Hungarian melodies put together by a younger rival of Brahms. They had not played twenty bars before the attention of every one in the room was more or less seized — unless we except Mr. Bickerton, whose children, good soul, were all down with some infantile ailment or other, and who was employed in furtively watching the clock all the time to see when it would be decent to order round the pony-carriage which would take him back to his pale overweighted spouse.

First came wild snatches of march music, primitive, savage, non-European; then a waltz of the lightest, maddest rhythm, broken here and there by strange barbaric clashes; then a song, plaintive and clinging, rich in the subtlest shades and melancholies of modern feeling.

‘Ah, but *excellent!*’ said Lady Charlotte once, under her breath, at a pause; ‘and what *entrain* — what beauty!’

For Rose’s figure was standing thrown out against the dusky blue of the tapestried walls, and from that delicate relief every curve, every grace, each tint — hair and cheek and gleaming arm gained an enchanting picture-like distinctness. There was jessamine at her waist and among the gold of her hair; the crystals on her neck, and on the little shoe thrown forward beyond her dress, caught the lamplight.

‘How can that man play with her and not fall in

SURREY

love with her?' thought Lady Charlotte to herself, with a sigh, perhaps, for her own youth. 'He looks cool enough, however; the typical don with his nose in the air!'

Then the slow passionate sweetness of the music swept her away with it, she being in her way a connoisseur, and she ceased to speculate. When the sounds ceased there was silence for a moment. Mrs. Darcy, who had a piano in her sitting-room whereon she strummed every morning with her tiny rheumatic fingers, and who had, as we know, strange little veins of sentiment running all about her, stared at Rose with open mouth. So did Catherine. Perhaps it was then for the first time that, touched by this publicity, this contagion of other people's feeling, Catherine realised fully against what a depth of stream she had been building her useless barriers.

'More! more!' cried Lady Charlotte.

The whole room seconded the demand save the squire and Mr. Bickerton. They withdrew together into a distant oriel. Robert, who was delighted with his little sister-in-law's success, went smiling to talk of it to Mrs. Darcy, while Catherine with a gentle coldness answered Mr. Longstaffe's questions on the same theme.

'Shall we?' said Rose, panting a little, but radiant, looking down on her companion.

'Command me!' he said, his grave lips slightly smiling, his eyes taking in the same vision that had charmed Lady Charlotte's. What a 'child of grace and genius'!

'But do you like it?' she persisted.

ROBERT ELSMERE

‘Like it — like accompanying your playing?’

‘Oh no!’ — impatiently; ‘showing off, I mean. I am quite ready to stop.’

‘Go on; go on!’ he said, laying his finger on the A. ‘You have driven all my *mauvaise honte* away. I have not heard you play so splendidly yet.’

She flushed all over. ‘Then we will go on,’ she said briefly.

So they plunged again into an Andante and Scherzo of Beethoven. How the girl threw herself into it, bringing out the wailing love-song of the Andante, the dainty tripping mirth of the Scherzo, in a way which set every nerve in Langham vibrating! Yet the art of it was wholly unconscious. The music was the mere natural voice of her inmost self. A comparison full of excitement was going on in that self between her first impressions of the man beside her, and her consciousness of him, as he seemed to-night, human, sympathetic, kind. A blissful sense of a mission filled the young silly soul. Like David, she was pitting herself and her gift against those dark powers which may invade and paralyse a life.

After the shouts of applause at the end had yielded to a burst of talk, in the midst of which Lady Charlotte, with exquisite infelicity, might have been heard laying down the law to Catherine as to how her sister’s remarkable musical powers might be best perfected, Langham turned to his companion, —

‘Do you know that for years I have enjoyed nothing so much as the music of the last two days?’

His black eyes shone upon her, transfused with something infinitely soft and friendly. She smiled.

SURREY

'How little I imagined that first evening that you cared for music!'

'Or about anything else worth caring for?' he asked her, laughing, but with always that little melancholy note in the laugh.

'Oh, if you like,' she said, with a shrug of her white shoulders. 'I believe you talked to Catherine the whole of the first evening, when you were n't reading "Hamlet" in the corner, about the arrangements for women's education at Oxford.'

'Could I have found a more respectable subject?' he inquired of her.

'The adjective is excellent,' she said with a little face, as she put her violin into its case. 'If I remember right, Catherine and I felt it personal. None of us were ever educated, except in arithmetic, sewing, English history, the Catechism, and "Paradise Lost." I taught myself French at seventeen, because one Molière wrote plays in it, and German because of Wagner. But they are *my* French and *my* German. I would n't advise anybody else to steal them!'

Langham was silent, watching the movements of the girl's agile fingers.

'I wonder,' he said at last, slowly, 'when I shall play that Beethoven again?'

'To-morrow morning if you have a conscience,' she said drily; 'we murdered one or two passages in fine style.'

He looked at her, startled. 'But I go by the morning train!' There was an instant's silence. Then the violin-case shut with a snap.

'I thought it was to be Saturday,' she said abruptly.

ROBERT ELSMERE

‘No,’ he answered with a sigh, ‘it was always Friday. There is a meeting in London I must get to to-morrow afternoon.’

‘Then we shan’t finish these Hungarian duets,’ she said slowly, turning away from him to collect some music on the piano.

Suddenly a sense of the difference between the week behind him, with all its ups and downs, its quarrels, its *ennuis*, its moments of delightful intimacy, of artistic freedom and pleasure, and those threadbare monotonous weeks into which he was to slip back on the morrow, awoke in him a mad inconsequent sting of disgust, of self-pity.

‘No, we shall finish nothing,’ he said in a voice which only she could hear, his hands lying on the keys; ‘there are some whose destiny it is never to finish — never to have enough — to leave the feast on the table, and all the edges of life ragged!’

Her lips trembled. They were far away, in the vast room, from the group Lady Charlotte was lecturing. Her nerves were all unsteady with music and feeling, and the face looking down on him had grown pale.

‘We make our own destiny,’ she said impatiently. ‘We choose. It is all our own doing. Perhaps destiny begins things — friendship, for instance; but afterwards it is absurd to talk of anything but ourselves. We keep our friends, our chances, our — our joys,’ she went on hurriedly, trying desperately to generalise, ‘or we throw them away wilfully, because we choose.’

Their eyes were riveted on each other.

‘Not wilfully,’ he said under his breath. ‘But —

SURREY

no matter. May I take you at your word, Miss Leyburn? Wretched shirker that I am, whom even Robert's charity despairs of: have I made a friend? Can I keep her?'

Extraordinary spell of the dark effeminate face — of its rare smile! The girl forgot all pride, all discretion. 'Try,' she whispered, and as his hand, stretching along the keyboard, instinctively felt for hers, for one instant — and another, and another — she gave it to him.

'Albert, come here!' exclaimed Lady Charlotte, beckoning to her husband; and Albert, though with a bad grace, obeyed. 'Just go and ask that girl to come and talk to me, will you? Why on earth did n't you make friends with her at dinner?'

The husband made some irritable answer, and the wife laughed.

'Just like you!' she said, with a good humour which seemed to him solely caused by the fact of his non-success with the beauty at table. 'You always expect to kill at the first stroke. I mean to take her in tow. Go and bring her here.'

Mr. Wynnstay sauntered off with as much dignity as his stature was capable of. He found Rose tying up her music at one end of the piano, while Langham was preparing to shut up the keyboard.

There was something appeasing in the girl's handsomeness. Mr. Wynnstay laid down his airs, paid her various compliments, and led her off to Lady Charlotte.

Langham stood by the piano, lost in a kind of miserable dream. Mrs. Darcy fluttered up to him.

ROBERT ELSMERE

‘Oh, Mr. Langham, you play so *beautifully*! Do play a solo!’

He subsided on to the music-bench obediently. On any ordinary occasion tortures could not have induced him to perform in a room full of strangers. He had far too lively and fastidious a sense of the futility of the amateur.

But he played — what, he knew not. Nobody listened but Mrs. Darcy, who sat lost in an armchair a little way off, her tiny foot beating time. Rose stopped talking, started, tried to listen. But Lady Charlotte had had enough music, and so had Mr. Longstaffe, who was endeavouring to joke himself into the good graces of the Duke of Sedbergh’s sister. The din of conversation rose at the challenge of the piano, and Langham was soon overcrowded.

Musically, it was perhaps as well, for the player’s inward tumult was so great that what his hands did he hardly knew or cared. He felt himself the greatest criminal unhung. Suddenly, through all that wilful mist of epicurean feeling which had been enwrapping him, there had pierced a sharp illumining beam from a girl’s eyes aglow with joy, with hope, with tenderness. In the name of Heaven, what had this growing degeneracy of every moral muscle led him to now? What! smile and talk, and smile — and be a villain all the time? What! encroach on a young life, like some creeping parasitic growth, taking all, able to give nothing in return — not even one genuine spark of genuine passion? Go philandering on till a child of nineteen shows you her warm impulsive heart, play on her imagination, on her pity, safe all the while in

SURREY

the reflexion that by the next day you will be far away, and her task and yours will be alike to forget! He shrinks from himself as one shrinks from a man capable of injuring anything weak and helpless. To despise the world's social code, and then to fall conspicuously below its simplest articles; to aim at being pure intelligence, pure open-eyed rationality, and not even to succeed in being a gentleman, as the poor commonplace world understands it! Oh, to fall at her feet, and ask her pardon before parting for ever! But no — no more posing; no more dramatising. How can he get away most quietly — make least sign? The thought of that walk home in the darkness fills him with a passion of irritable impatience.

‘Look at that Romney, Mr. Elsmere; just look at it!’ cried Dr. Meyrick excitedly; ‘did you ever see anything finer? There was one of those London dealer fellows down here last summer offered the squire four thousand pounds down on the nail for it.’

In this way Meyrick had been taking Robert round the drawing-room, doing the honours of every stick and stone in it, his eye-glass in his eye, his thin old face shining with pride over the Wendover possessions. And so the two gradually neared the oriel where the squire and Mr. Bickerton were standing.

Robert was in twenty minds as to any further conversation with the squire. After the ladies had gone, while every nerve in him was still tingling with anger, he had done his best to keep up indifferent talk on local matters with Mr. Bickerton. Inwardly he was asking himself whether he should ever sit at the squire's

ROBERT ELSMERE

table and eat his bread again. It seemed to him that they had had a brush which would be difficult to forget. And as he sat there before the squire's wine, hot with righteous heat, all his grievances against the man and the landlord crowded upon him. A fig for intellectual eminence if it make a man oppress his inferiors and bully his equals!

But as the minutes passed on, the rector had cooled down. The sweet, placable, scrupulous nature began to blame itself. 'What, play your cards so badly, give up the game so rashly, the very first round? Nonsense! Patience and try again. There must be some cause in the background. No need to be white-livered, but every need, in the case of such a man as the squire, to take no hasty needless offence.'

So he had cooled and cooled, and now here were Meyrick and he close to the squire and his companion. The two men, as the rector approached, were discussing some cases of common enclosure that had just taken place in the neighbourhood. Robert listened a moment, then struck in. Presently, when the chat dropped, he began to express to the squire his pleasure in the use of the library. His manner was excellent, courtesy itself, but without any trace of effusion.

'I believe,' he said at last, smiling, 'my father used to be allowed the same privileges. If so, it quite accounts for the way in which he clung to Murewell.'

'I had never the honour of Mr. Edward Elsmere's acquaintance,' said the squire frigidly. 'During the time of his occupation of the rectory I was not in England.'

SURREY

‘I know. Do you still go much to Germany? Do you keep up your relations with Berlin?’

‘I have not seen Berlin for fifteen years,’ said the squire briefly, his eyes in their wrinkled sockets fixed sharply on the man who ventured to question him about himself, uninvited. There was an awkward pause. Then the squire turned again to Mr. Bickerton.

‘Bickerton, have you noticed how many trees that storm of last February has brought down at the north-east corner of the park?’

Robert was inexpressibly galled by the movement, by the words themselves. The squire had not yet addressed a single remark of any kind about Murewell to *him*. There was a deliberate intention to exclude implied in this appeal to the man who was not the man of the place, on such a local point, which struck Robert very forcibly.

He walked away to where his wife was sitting.

‘What time is it?’ whispered Catherine, looking up at him.

‘Time to go,’ he returned, smiling, but she caught the discomposure in his tone and look at once, and her wifely heart rose against the squire. She got up, drawing herself together with a gesture that became her.

‘Then let us go at once,’ she said. ‘Where is Rose?’

A minute later there was a general leave-taking. Oddly enough it found the squire in the midst of a conversation with Langham. As though to show more clearly that it was the rector personally who was in his black books, Mr. Wendover had already devoted some cold attention to Catherine both at and after

dinner, and he had no sooner routed Robert than he moved in his slouching way across from Mr. Bickerton to Langham. And now, another man altogether, he was talking and laughing — describing apparently a reception at the French Academy — the epigrams flying, the harsh face all lit up, the thin bony fingers gesticulating freely.

The husband and wife exchanged glances as they stood waiting, while Lady Charlotte, in her loudest voice, was commanding Rose to come and see her in London any Thursday after the first of November. Robert was very sore. Catherine passionately felt it, and forgetting everything but him, longed to be out with him in the park comforting him.

‘What an absurd fuss you have been making about that girl,’ Wynnstay exclaimed to his wife as the Elsmere party left the room, the squire conducting Catherine with a chill politeness. ‘And now, I suppose, you will be having her up in town, and making some young fellow who ought to know better fall in love with her. I am told the father was a grammar-school headmaster. Why can’t you leave people where they belong?’

‘I have already pointed out to you,’ Lady Charlotte observed calmly, ‘that the world has moved on since you were launched into it. I can’t keep up class distinctions to please you; otherwise, no doubt, being the devoted wife I am, I might try. However, my dear, we both have our fancies. You collect Sèvres china with or without a pedigree,’ and she coughed drily; ‘I collect promising young women. On the whole, I think my hobby is more beneficial to you than yours is profitable to me.’

SURREY

Mr. Wynnstay was furious. Only a week before he had been childishly, shamefully taken in by a Jew curiosity-dealer from Vienna, to his wife's huge amusement. If looks could have crushed her, Lady Charlotte would have been crushed. But she was far too substantial as she lay back in her chair, one large foot crossed over the other, and, as her husband very well knew, the better man of the two. He walked away, murmuring under his moustache words that would hardly have borne publicity, while Lady Charlotte, through her glasses, made a minute study of a little French portrait hanging some two yards from her.

Meanwhile the Elsmere party were stepping out into the warm damp of the night. The storm had died away, but a soft Scotch mist of rain filled the air. Everything was dark, save for a few ghostly glimmerings through the trees of the avenue; and there was a strong sweet smell of wet earth and grass. Rose had drawn the hood of her waterproof over her head, and her face gleamed an indistinct whiteness from its shelter. Oh this leaping pulse — this bright glow of expectation! How had she made this stupid blunder about his going? Oh, it was Catherine's mistake, of course, at the beginning. But what matter? Here they were in the dark, side by side, friends now, friends always. Catherine should not spoil their last walk together. She felt a passionate trust that *he* would not allow it.

'Wifie!' exclaimed Robert, drawing her a little apart, 'do you know it has just occurred to me that, as I was going through the park this afternoon by the

lower footpath, I crossed Henslowe coming away from the house. Of course this is what has happened! *He* has told his story first. No doubt just before I met him he had been giving the squire a full and particular account — *à la* Henslowe — of my proceedings since I came. Henslowe lays it on thick — paints with a will. The squire receives me afterwards as the meddlesome pragmatist he understands me to be; puts his foot down to begin with; and *hinc illæ lacrymæ*. It's as clear as daylight! I thought that man had an odd twist of the lip as he passed me.'

'Then a disagreeable evening will be the worst of it,' said Catherine proudly. 'I imagine, Robert, you can defend yourself against that bad man?'

'He has got the start; he has no scruples; and it remains to be seen whether the squire has a heart to appeal to,' replied the young rector with sore reflectiveness. 'Oh, Catherine, have you ever thought, wife, what a business it will be for us if I *can't* make friends with that man? Here we are at his gates — all our people in his power; the *comfort*, at any rate, of our social life depending on him. And what a strange, unmanageable, inexplicable being!'

Elsmere sighed aloud. Like all quick imaginative natures he was easily depressed, and the squire's sombre figure had for the moment darkened his whole horizon. Catherine laid her cheek against his arm in the darkness, consoling, remonstrating, every other thought lost in her sympathy with Robert's worries. Langham and Rose slipped out of her head; Elsmere's step had quickened, as it always did when he was excited, and she kept up without thinking.

SURREY

When Langham found the others had shot ahead in the darkness, and he and his neighbour were *tête-à-tête*, despair seized him. But for once he showed a sort of dreary presence of mind. Suddenly, while the girl beside him was floating in a golden dream of feeling, he plunged with a stiff deliberation born of his inner conflict into a discussion of the German system of musical training. Rose, startled, made some vague and flippant reply. Langham pursued the matter. He had some information about it, it appeared, garnered up in his mind, which might perhaps some day prove useful to her. A St. Anselm's undergraduate, one Dashwood, an old pupil of his, had been lately at Berlin for six months, studying at the Conservatorium. Not long ago, being anxious to become a schoolmaster, he had written to Langham for a testimonial. His letter had contained a full account of his musical life. Langham proceeded to recapitulate it.

His careful and precise report of hours, fees, masters, and methods lasted till they reached the park gate. He had the smallest powers of social acting, and his rôle was dismally overdone. The girl beside him could not know that he was really defending her from himself. His cold altered manner merely seemed to her a sudden and marked withdrawal of his petition for her friendship. No doubt she had received that petition too effusively — and he wished there should be no mistake.

What a young smarting soul went through in that half-mile of listening is better guessed than analysed. There are certain moments of shame, which only women know, and which seem to sting and burn out

ROBERT ELSMERE

of youth all its natural sweet self-love. A woman may outlive them, but never forget them. If she pass through one at nineteen her cheek will grow hot over it at seventy. Her companion's measured tone, the flow of deliberate speech which came from him, the nervous aloofness of his attitude — every detail in that walk seemed to Rose's excited sense an insult.

As the park gate swung behind them she felt a sick longing for Catherine's shelter. Then all the pride in her rushed to the rescue and held that swooning dismay at the heart of her in check. And forthwith she capped Langham's minute account of the scale-method of a famous Berlin pianist by some witty stories of the latest London prodigy, a child-violinist, incredibly gifted, dirty, and greedy, whom she had made friends with in town. The girl's voice rang out sharp and hard under the trees. Where, in fortune's name, were the lights of the rectory? Would this nightmare never come to an end?

At the rectory gate was Catherine waiting for them, her whole soul one repentant alarm.

'Mr. Langham, Robert has gone to the study; will you go and smoke with him?'

'By all means. Good-night, then, Mrs. Elsmere.'

Catherine gave him her hand. Rose was trying hard to fit the lock of the gate into the hasp, and had no hand free. Besides, he did not approach her.

'Good-night!' she said to him over her shoulder.

'Oh, and Mr. Langham!' Catherine called after him as he strode away, 'will you settle with Robert about the carriage?'

He turned, made a sound of assent, and went on.

SURREY

‘When?’ asked Rose lightly.

‘For the nine o’clock train.’

‘There should be a law against interfering with people’s breakfast-hour,’ said Rose; ‘though, to be sure, a guest may as well get himself gone early and be done with it. How you and Robert raced, Cathie! We did our best to catch you up, but the pace was too good.’

Was there a wild taunt, a spice of malice in the girl’s reckless voice? Catherine could not see her in the darkness, but the sister felt a sudden trouble invade her.

‘Rose, darling, you are not tired?’

‘Oh dear, no! Good-night, sleep well. What a goose Mrs. Darcy is!’

And, barely submitting to be kissed, Rose ran up the steps and upstairs.

Langham and Robert smoked till midnight. Langham for the first time gave Elsmere an outline of his plans for the future, and Robert, filled with dismay at this final breach with Oxford and human society, and the only form of practical life possible to such a man, threw himself into protests more and more vigorous and affectionate. Langham listened to them at first with sombre silence, then with an impatience which gradually reduced Robert to a sore puffing at his pipe. There was a long space during which they sat together, the ashes of the little fire Robert had made dropping on the hearth, and not a word on either side.

At last Elsmere could not bear it, and when midnight struck he sprang up with an impatient shake of his long body, and Langham took the hint, gave him a cold good-night, and went.

ROBERT ELSMERE

As the door shut upon him Robert dropped back into his chair, and sat on, his face in his hands, staring dolefully at the fire. It seemed to him the world was going crookedly. A day on which a man of singularly open and responsive temper makes a new enemy, and comes nearer than ever before to losing an old friend, shows very blackly to him in the calendar, and, by way of aggravation, Robert Elsmere says to himself at once that somehow or other there must be fault of his own in the matter.

Rose! — pshaw! Catherine little knows what stuff that cold intangible soul is made of.

Meanwhile, Langham was standing heavily, looking out into the night. The different elements in the mountain of discomfort that weighed upon him were so many that the weary mind made no attempt to analyse them. He had a sense of disgrace, of having stabbed something gentle that had leant upon him, mingled with a strong intermittent feeling of unutterable relief. Perhaps his keenest regret was that, after all, it had not been love! He had offered himself up to a girl's just contempt, but he had no recompense in the shape of a great addition to knowledge, to experience. Save for a few doubtful moments at the beginning, when he had all but surprised himself in something more poignant, what he had been conscious of had been nothing more than a suave and delicate charm of sentiment, a subtle surrender to one exquisite æsthetic impression after another. And these things in other relations the world had yielded him before.

‘Am I sane?’ he muttered to himself. ‘Have I ever been sane? Probably not. The disproportion between

SURREY

my motives and other men's is too great to be normal. Well, at least I am sane enough to shut myself up. Long after that beautiful child has forgotten she ever saw me I shall still be doing penance in the desert.'

He threw himself down beside the open window with a groan. An hour later he lifted a face blanched and lined, and stretched out his hand with avidity towards a book on the table. It was an obscure and difficult Greek text, and he spent the greater part of the night over it, rekindling in himself with feverish haste the embers of his one lasting passion.

Meanwhile, in a room overhead, another last scene in this most futile of dramas was passing. Rose, when she came in, had locked the door, torn off her dress and her ornaments, and flung herself on the edge of the bed, her hands on her knees, her shoulders drooping, a fierce red spot on either cheek. There for an indefinite time she went through a torture of self-scorn. The incidents of the week passed before her one by one — her sallies, her defiances, her impulsive friendliness, the *élan*, the happiness of the last two days, the self-abandonment of this evening. Oh, intolerable — intolerable!

And all to end with the intimation that she had been behaving like a forward child — had gone too far and must be admonished — made to feel accordingly! The poisoned arrow pierced deeper and deeper into the girl's shrinking pride. The very foundations of self-respect seemed overthrown.

Suddenly her eye caught a dim and ghostly reflexion of her own figure, as she sat with locked hands on the edge of the bed, in a long glass near, the only one

ROBERT ELSMERE

of the kind which the rectory household possessed. Rose sprang up, snatched at the candle, which was flickering in the air of the open window, and stood erect before the glass, holding the candle above her head.

What the light showed her was a slim form in a white dressing-gown, that fell loosely about it; a rounded arm upstretched; a head, still crowned with its jessamine wreath, from which the bright hair fell heavily over shoulders and bosom; eyes, under frowning brows, flashing a proud challenge at what they saw; two lips, 'indifferent red,' just open to let the quick breath come through — all thrown into the wildest chiaroscuro by the wavering candle-flame.

Her challenge was answered. The fault was not there. Her arm dropped. She put down the light.

'*I am* handsome,' she said to herself, her mouth quivering, childishly. 'I am. I may say it to myself.'

Then, standing by the window, she stared into the night. Her room, on the opposite side of the house from Langham's, looked over the cornfields and the distance. The stubbles gleamed faintly; the dark woods, the clouds teased by the rising wind, sent a moaning voice to greet her.

'I hate him! I hate him!' she cried to the darkness, clenching her cold little hand.

Then presently she slipped on to her knees, and buried her head in the bed-clothes. She was crying — angry stifled tears which had the hot impatience of youth in them. It all seemed to her so untoward. This was not the man she had dreamed of — the unknown of her inmost heart. *He* had been young, ardent, im-

SURREY

petuous like herself. Hand in hand, eye flashing into eye, pulse answering to pulse, they would have flung aside the veil hanging over life and plundered the golden mysteries behind it.

She rebels; she tries to see the cold alien nature which has laid this paralysing spell upon her as it is, to reason herself back to peace — to indifference. The poor child flies from her own half-understood trouble; will none of it; murmurs again wildly —

‘I hate him! I hate him! Cold-blooded — ungrateful — unkind!’

In vain. A pair of melancholy eyes haunt, enthrall her inmost soul. The charm of the denied, the inaccessible, is on her, womanlike.

That old sense of capture, of helplessness, as of some lassoed struggling creature, descended upon her. She lay sobbing there, trying to recall what she had been a week before; the whirl of her London visit, the ambitions with which it had filled her; the bewildering many-coloured lights it had thrown upon life; the intoxicating sense of artistic power. In vain.

‘The stream will not flow, and the hills will not rise;
And the colours have all passed away from her eyes.’

She felt herself bereft, despoiled. And yet through it all, as she lay weeping, there came flooding a strange contradictory sense of growth, of enrichment. In such moments of pain does a woman first begin to live? Ah! why should it hurt so — this long-awaited birth of the soul?

BOOK III
THE SQUIRE

CHAPTER XIX

THE evening of the Murewell Hall dinner-party proved to be a date of some importance in the lives of two or three persons. Rose was not likely to forget it; Langham carried about with him the picture of the great drawing-room, its stately light and shade, and its scattered figures, through many a dismal subsequent hour; and to Robert it was the beginning of a period of practical difficulties such as his fortunate youth had never yet encountered.

His conjecture had hit the mark. The squire's sentiments towards him, which had been on the whole friendly enough, with the exception of a slight *nuance* of contempt provoked in Mr. Wendover's mind by all forms of the clerical calling, had been completely transformed in the course of the afternoon before the dinner-party, and transformed by the report of his agent. Henslowe, who knew certain sides of the squire's character by heart, had taken Time by the forelock. For fourteen years before Robert entered the parish he had been king of it. Mr. Preston, Robert's predecessor, had never given him a moment's trouble. The agent had developed a habit of drinking, had favoured his friends and spited his enemies, and had allowed certain distant portions of the estate to go finely to ruin, quite undisturbed by any sentimental meddling of the priestly sort. Then the old rector had been gathered to the majority, and this long-legged

ROBERT ELSMERE

busy-body had taken his place, a man, according to the agent, as full of communistical notions as an egg is full of meat, and always ready to poke his nose into other people's business. And as all men like mastery, but especially Scotchmen, and as during even the first few months of the new rector's tenure of office it became tolerably evident to Henslowe that young Elsmere would soon become the ruling force of the neighbourhood unless measures were taken to prevent it, the agent, over his nocturnal drams, had taken sharp and cunning counsel with himself concerning the young man.

The state of Mile End had been originally the result of indolence and caprice on his part rather than of any set purpose of neglect. As soon, however, as it was brought to his notice by Elsmere, who did it, to begin with, in the friendliest way, it became a point of honour with the agent to let the place go to the devil, nay, to hurry it there. For some time, notwithstanding, he avoided an open breach with the rector. He met Elsmere's remonstrances by a more or less civil show of argument, belied every now and then by the sarcasm of his coarse blue eye, and so far the two men had kept outwardly on terms. Elsmere had reason to know that on one or two occasions of difficulty in the parish Henslowe had tried to do him a mischief. The attempts, however, had not greatly succeeded, and their ill-success had probably excited in Elsmere a confidence of ultimate victory which had tended to keep him cool in the presence of Henslowe's hostility. But Henslowe had been all along merely waiting for the squire. He had served the owner of the Murewell

THE SQUIRE

estate for fourteen years, and if he did not know that owner's peculiarities by this time, might he obtain certain warm corners in the next life to which he was fond of consigning other people! It was not easy to cheat the squire out of money, but it was quite easy to play upon his ignorance of the details of English land management — ignorance guaranteed by the learned habits of a lifetime — on his complete lack of popular sympathy, and on the contempt felt by the disciple of Bismarck and Mommsen for all forms of altruistic sentiment. The squire despised priests. He hated philanthropic cants. Above all things he respected his own leisure, and was abnormally, irritably sensitive as to any possible inroads upon it.

All these things Henslowe knew, and all these things he utilised. He saw the squire within forty-eight hours of his arrival at Murewell. His fancy picture of Robert and his doings was introduced with adroitness, and coloured with great skill, and he left the squire walking up and down his library, chafing alternately at the monstrous fate which had planted this sentimental agitator at his gates, and at the memory of his own misplaced civilities towards the intruder. In the evening those civilities were abundantly avenged, as we have seen.

Robert was much perplexed as to his next step. His heart was very sore. The condition of Mile End — those gaunt-eyed women and wasted children, all the sordid details of their unjust avoidable suffering weighed upon his nerves perpetually. But he was conscious that this state of feeling was one of tension, perhaps of exaggeration, and though it was impossible

he should let the matter alone, he was anxious to do nothing rashly.

However, two days after the dinner-party he met Henslowe on the hill leading up to the rectory. Robert would have passed the man with a stiffening of his tall figure and the slightest possible salutation. But the agent, just returned from a round wherein the bars of various local inns had played a conspicuous part, was in a truculent mood and stopped to speak. He took up the line of insolent condolence with the rector on the impossibility of carrying his wishes with regard to Mile End into effect. They had been laid before the squire, of course, but the squire had his own ideas and was n't just easy to manage.

'Seen him yet, sir?' Henslowe wound up jauntily, every line of his flushed countenance, the full lips under the fair beard, and the light prominent eyes, expressing a triumph he hardly cared to conceal.

'I have seen him, but I have not talked to him on this particular matter,' said the rector quietly, though the red mounted in his cheek. 'You may, however, be very sure, Mr. Henslowe, that everything I know about Mile End the squire shall know before long.'

'Oh, lor' bless me, sir!' cried Henslowe, with a guffaw, 'it's all one to me. And if the squire ain't satisfied with the way his work's done now, why he can take you on as a second string, you know. You'd show us all, I'll be bound, how to make the money fly.'

Then Robert's temper gave way, and he turned upon the half-drunken brute before him with a few home-truths delivered with a rapier-like force which

THE SQUIRE

for the moment staggered Henslowe, who turned from red to purple. The rector, with some of those pitiful memories of the hamlet, of which we had glimpses in his talk with Langham, burning at his heart, felt the man no better than a murderer, and as good as told him so. Then, without giving him time to reply, Robert strode on, leaving Henslowe planted in the pathway. But he was hardly up the hill before the agent, having recovered himself by dint of copious expletives, was looking after him with a grim chuckle. He knew his master, and he knew himself, and he thought between them they would about manage to keep that young spark in order.

Robert meanwhile went straight home into his study, and there fell upon ink and paper. What was the good of protracting the matter any longer? Something must and should be done for these people, if not one way, then another.

So he wrote to the squire, showing the letter to Catherine when it was done, lest there should be anything over-fierce in it. It was the simple record of twelve months' experience told with dignity and strong feeling. Henslowe was barely mentioned in it, and the chief burden of the letter was to implore the squire to come and inspect certain portions of his property with his own eyes. The rector would be at his service any day or hour.

Husband and wife went anxiously through the document, softening here, improving there, and then it was sent to the Hall. Robert waited nervously through the day for an answer. In the evening, while he and Catherine were in the footpath after dinner, watching

ROBERT ELSMERE

a chilly autumnal moonrise over the stubbles of the cornfield, the answer came.

‘H’m,’ said Robert dubiously as he opened it, holding it up to the moonlight; ‘can’t be said to be lengthy.’

He and Catherine hurried into the house. Robert read the letter, and handed it to her without a word.

After some curt references to one or two miscellaneous points raised in the latter part of the rector’s letter, the squire wound up as follows: —

‘As for the bulk of your communication, I am at a loss to understand the vehemence of your remarks on the subject of my Mile End property. My agent informed me shortly after my return home that you had been concerning yourself greatly, and, as he conceived, unnecessarily about the matter. Allow me to assure you that I have full confidence in Mr. Henslowe, who has been in the district for as many years as you have spent months in it, and whose authority on points connected with the business management of my estate naturally carries more weight with me, if you will permit me to say so, than your own. — I am, sir, your obedient servant,

‘ROGER WENDOVER.’

Catherine returned the letter to her husband with a look of dismay. He was standing with his back to the chimney-piece, his hands thrust far into his pockets, his upper lip quivering. In his happy expansive life this was the sharpest personal rebuff that had ever happened to him. He could not but smart under it.

THE SQUIRE

‘Not a word,’ he said, tossing his hair back impetuously, as Catherine stood opposite watching him — ‘not one single word about the miserable people themselves! What kind of stuff can the man be made of?’

‘Does he believe you?’ asked Catherine, bewildered.

‘If not, one must try and make him,’ he said energetically, after a moment’s pause. ‘To-morrow, Catherine, I go down to the Hall and see him.’

She quietly acquiesced, and the following afternoon, first thing after luncheon, she watched him go, her tender inspiring look dwelling with him as he crossed the park, which was lying delicately wrapped in one of the whitest of autumnal mists, the sun just playing through it with pale invading shafts.

The butler looked at him with some doubtfulness. It was never safe to admit visitors for the squire without orders. But he and Robert had special relations. As the possessor of a bass voice worthy of his girth, Vincent, under Robert’s rule, had become the pillar of the choir, and it was not easy for him to refuse the rector.

So Robert was led in, through the hall, and down the long passage to the curtained door, which he knew so well.

‘Mr. Elsmere, sir!’

There was a sudden hasty movement. Robert passed a magnificent lacquered screen newly placed round the door, and found himself in the squire’s presence.

The squire had half-risen from his seat in a capacious chair, with a litter of books round it, and confronted his visitor with a look of surprised annoyance. The

figure of the rector, tall, thin, and youthful, stood out against the delicate browns and whites of the book-lined walls. The great room, so impressively bare when Robert and Langham had last seen it, was now full of the signs of a busy man's constant habitation. An odour of smoke pervaded it; the table in the window was piled with books just unpacked, and the half-emptied case from which they had been taken lay on the ground beside the squire's chair.

'I persuaded Vincent to admit me, Mr. Wendover,' said Robert, advancing hat in hand, while the squire hastily put down the German professor's pipe he had just been enjoying, and coldly accepted his proffered greeting. 'I should have preferred not to disturb you without an appointment, but after your letter it seemed to me some prompt personal explanation was necessary.'

The squire stiffly motioned towards a chair, which Robert took, and then slipped back into his own, his wrinkled eyes fixed on the intruder.

Robert, conscious of almost intolerable embarrassment, but maintaining in spite of it an excellent degree of self-control, plunged at once into business. He took the letter he had just received from the squire as a text, made a good-humoured defence of his own proceedings, described his attempt to move Henslowe, and the reluctance of his appeal from the man to the master. The few things he allowed himself to say about Henslowe were in perfect temper, though by no means without an edge.

Then, having disposed of the more personal aspects of the matter, he paused, and looked hesitatingly at

THE SQUIRE

the face opposite him, more like a bronzed mask at this moment than a human countenance. The squire however, gave him no help. He had received his remarks so far in perfect silence, and seeing that there were more to come, he waited for them with the same rigidity of look and attitude.

So, after a moment or two, Robert went on to describe in detail some of those individual cases of hardship and disease at Mile End, during the preceding year, which could be most clearly laid to the sanitary condition of the place. Filth, damp, leaking roofs, foul floors, poisoned water—he traced to each some ghastly human ill, telling his stories with a nervous brevity, a suppressed fire, which would have burnt them into the sense of almost any other listener. Not one of these woes but he and Catherine had tended with sickening pity and labour of body and mind. That side of it he kept rigidly out of sight. But all that he could hurl against the squire's feeling, as it were, he gathered up, strangely conscious through it all of his own young persistent yearning to right himself with this man, whose mental history, as it lay chronicled in these rooms, had been to him, at a time of intellectual hunger, so stimulating, so enriching.

But passion and reticence and hidden sympathy were alike lost upon the squire. Before he paused Mr. Wendover had already risen restlessly from his chair, and from the rug was glowering down on his unwelcome visitor.

Good heavens! had he come home to be lectured in his own library by this fanatical slip of a parson? As

for his stories, the squire barely took the trouble to listen to them.

Every popularity-hunting fool, with a passion for putting his hand into other people's pockets, can tell pathetic stories; but it was intolerable that his scholar's privacy should be at the mercy of one of the tribe.

'Mr. Elsmere,' he broke out at last with contemptuous emphasis, 'I imagine it would have been better — infinitely better — to have spared both yourself and me the disagreeables of this interview. However, I am not sorry we should understand each other. I have lived a life which is at least double the length of yours in very tolerable peace and comfort. The world has been good enough for me, and I for it, so far. I have been master in my own estate, and intend to remain so. As for the new-fangled ideas of a landowner's duty, with which your mind seems to be full' — the scornful irritation of the tone was unmistakeable — 'I have never dabbled in them, nor do I intend to begin now. I am like the rest of my kind; I have no money to chuck away in building-schemes, in order that the rector of the parish may pose as the apostle of the agricultural labourer. That, however, is neither here nor there. What is to the purpose is, that my business affairs are in the hands of a business man, deliberately chosen and approved by me, and that I have nothing to do with them. Nothing at all!' he repeated with emphasis. 'It may seem to you very shocking. You may regard it as the object in life of the English landowner to inspect the pig-styes and amend the habits of the English labourer. I don't quarrel with the con-

THE SQUIRE

ception, I only ask you not to expect me to live up to it. I am a student first and foremost, and desire to be left to my books. Mr. Henslowe is there on purpose to protect my literary freedom. What he thinks desirable is good enough for me, as I have already informed you. I am sorry for it if his methods do not commend themselves to you. But I have yet to learn that the rector of the parish has an *ex-officio* right to interfere between a landlord and his tenants.'

Robert kept his temper with some difficulty. After a pause he said, feeling desperately, however, that the suggestion was not likely to improve matters, —

'If I were to take all the trouble and all the expense off your hands, Mr. Wendover, would it be impossible for you to authorise me to make one or two alterations most urgently necessary for the improvement of the Mile End cottages?'

The squire burst into an angry laugh.

'I have never yet been in the habit, Mr. Elsmere, of doing my repairs by public subscription. You ask a little too much from an old man's powers of adaptation.'

Robert rose from his seat, his hand trembling as it rested on his walking-stick.

'Mr. Wendover,' he said, speaking at last with a flash of answering scorn in his young vibrating voice, 'what I think you cannot understand is that at any moment a human creature may sicken and die, poisoned by the state of your property, for which you — and nobody else — are ultimately responsible.'

The squire shrugged his shoulders.

'So you say, Mr. Elsmere. If true, every person in

such a condition has a remedy in his own hands. I force no one to remain on my property.'

'The people who live there,' exclaimed Robert, 'have neither home nor subsistence if they are driven out. Murewell is full — times bad — most of the people old.'

'And eviction "a sentence of death," I suppose,' interrupted the squire, studying him with sarcastic eyes. 'Well, I have no belief in a Gladstonian Ireland, still less in a Radical England. Supply and demand, cause and effect, are enough for me. The Mile End cottages are out of repair, Mr. Elsmere, so Mr. Henslowe tells me, because the site is unsuitable, the type of cottage out of date. People live in them at their peril; I don't pull them down, or rather' — correcting himself with exasperating consistency — 'Mr. Henslowe does n't pull them down, because, like other men, I suppose, he dislikes an outcry. But if the population stays, it stays at its own risk. Now have I made myself plain?'

The two men eyed one another.

'Perfectly plain,' said Robert quietly. 'Allow me to remind you, Mr. Wendover, that there are other matters than eviction capable of provoking an outcry.'

'As you please,' said the other indifferently. 'I have no doubt I shall find myself in the newspapers before long. If so, I dare say I shall manage to put up with it. Society is made up of fanatics and the creatures they hunt. If I am to be hunted, I shall be in good company.'

Robert stood hat in hand, tormented with a dozen cross-currents of feeling. He was forcibly struck with

THE SQUIRE

the blind and comparatively motiveless pugnacity of the squire's conduct. There was an extravagance in it which for the first time recalled to him old Meyrick's lucubrations.

'I have done no good, I see, Mr. Wendover,' he said at last, slowly. 'I wish I could have induced you to do an act of justice and mercy. I wish I could have made you think more kindly of myself. I have failed in both. It is useless to keep you any longer. Good-morning.'

He bowed. The squire also bent forward. At that moment Robert caught sight beside his shoulder of an antique, standing on the mantelpiece, which was a new addition to the room. It was a head of Medusa, and the frightful stony calm of it struck on Elsmere's ruffled nerves with extraordinary force. It flashed across him that here was an apt symbol of that absorbing and overgrown life of the intellect which blights the heart and chills the senses. And to that spiritual Medusa, the man before him was not the first victim he had known.

Possessed with the fancy the young man made his way into the hall. Arrived there, he looked round with a kind of passionate regret: 'Shall I ever see this again?' he asked himself. During the past twelve months his pleasure in the great house had been much more than sensuous. Within those walls his mind had grown, had reached to a fuller stature than before, and a man loves, or should love all that is associated with the maturing of his best self.

He closed the ponderous doors behind him sadly. The magnificent pile, grander than ever in the sunny autumnal mist which enwrapped it, seemed to look

ROBERT ELSMERE

after him as he walked away, mutely wondering, that he should have allowed anything so trivial as a peasant's grievance to come between him and its perfections.

In the wooded lane outside the rectory gate he overtook Catherine. He gave her his report, and they walked on together arm-in-arm, a very depressed pair.

'What shall you do next?' she asked him.

'Make out the law of the matter,' he said briefly.

'If you get over the inspector,' said Catherine anxiously, 'I am tolerably certain Henslowe will turn out the people.'

He would not dare, Robert thought. At any rate, the law existed for such cases, and it was his bounden duty to call the inspector's attention.

Catherine did not see what good could be done thereby, and feared harm. But her wifely chivalry felt that he must get through his first serious practical trouble his own way. She saw that he felt himself distressingly young and inexperienced, and would not for the world have harassed him by over-advice.

So she let him alone, and presently Robert threw the matter from him with a sigh.

'Let it be a while,' he said, with a shake of his long frame. 'I shall get morbid over it if I don't mind. I am a selfish wretch too. I know you have worries of your own, wifie.'

And he took her hand under the trees and kissed it with a boyish tenderness.

'Yes,' said Catherine, sighing, and then paused. 'Robert,' she burst out again, 'I am certain that man

THE SQUIRE

made love of a kind to Rose. *He* will never think of it again, but since the night before last she, to my mind, is simply a changed creature.'

'I don't see it,' said Robert doubtfully.

Catherine looked at him with a little angel scorn in her grey eyes. That men should make their seeing in such matters the measure of the visible!

'You have been studying the squire, sir — I have been studying Rose.'

Then she poured out her heart to him, describing the little signs of change and suffering her anxious sense had noted, in spite of Rose's proud effort to keep all the world, but especially Catherine, at arm's length. And at the end her feeling swept her into a denunciation of Langham, which was to Robert like a breath from the past, from those stern hills wherein he met her first. The happiness of their married life had so softened or masked all her ruggedness of character, that there was a certain joy in seeing those strong forces in her which had struck him first reappear.

'Of course I feel myself to blame,' he said when she stopped. 'But how could one foresee, with such an inveterate hermit and recluse? And I owed him — I owe him — so much.'

'I know,' said Catherine, but frowning still. It probably seemed to her that that old debt had been more than effaced.

'You will have to send her to Berlin,' said Elsmere after a pause. 'You must play off her music against this unlucky feeling. If it exists it is your only chance.'

'Yes, she must go to Berlin,' said Catherine slowly.

ROBERT ELSMERE

Then presently she looked up, a flash of exquisite feeling breaking up the delicate resolution of the face.

‘I am not sad about that, Robert. Oh, how you have widened my world for me!’

Suddenly that hour in Marrisdale came back to her. They were in the woodpath. She crept inside her husband’s arm and put up her face to him, swept away by an overmastering impulse of self-humiliating love.

The next day Robert walked over to the little market town of Churton, saw the discreet and long-established solicitor of the place, and got from him a complete account of the present state of the rural sanitary law. The first step clearly was to move the sanitary inspector; if that failed for any reason, then any *bona fide* inhabitant had an appeal to the local sanitary authority, viz. the board of guardians. Robert walked home pondering his information, and totally ignorant that Henslowe, who was always at Churton on market-days, had been in the market-place at the moment when the rector’s tall figure had disappeared within Mr. Dunstan’s office-door. That door was unpleasantly known to the agent in connexion with some energetic measures for raising money he had been lately under the necessity of employing, and it had a way of attracting his eyes by means of the fascination that often attaches to disagreeable objects.

In the evening Rose was sitting listlessly in the drawing-room. Catherine was not there, so her novel was on her lap and her eyes were staring intently into a world whereof they only had the key. Suddenly there was a ring at the bell. The servant came, and

THE SQUIRE

there were several voices and a sound of much shoe-scraping. Then the swing-door leading to the study opened and Elsmere and Catherine came out. Elsmere stopped with an exclamation.

His visitors were two men from Mile End. One was old Milsom, more sallow and palsied than ever. As he stood bent almost double, his old knotted hand resting for support on the table beside him, everything in the little hall seemed to shake with him. The other was Sharland, the handsome father of the twins, whose wife had been fed by Catherine with every imaginable delicacy since Robert's last visit to the hamlet. Even his strong youth had begun to show signs of premature decay. The rolling gipsy eyes were growing sunken, the limbs dragged a little.

They had come to implore the rector to let Mile End alone. Henslowe had been over there in the afternoon, and had given them all very plainly to understand that if Mr. Elsmere meddled any more they would be all turned out at a week's notice to shift as they could. 'And if you don't find Thurston Common nice lying this weather, with the winter coming on, you'll know who to thank for it,' the agent had flung behind him as he rode off.

Robert turned white. Rose, watching the little scene with listless eyes, saw him towering over the group like an embodiment of wrath and pity.

'If they turn us out, sir,' said old Milsom, wistfully looking up at Elsmere with bleary eyes, 'there'll be nothing left but the House for us old 'uns. Why, lor' bless you, sir, it's not so bad but we can make shift.'

'You, Milsom!' cried Robert; 'and you've just all

ROBERT ELSMERE

but lost your grandchild! And you know your wife'll never be the same woman since that bout of fever in the spring. And —'

His quick eyes ran over the old man's broken frame with a world of indignant meaning in them.

'Aye, aye, sir,' said Milsom, unmoved. 'But if it is n't fevers, it's summat else. I can make a shilling or two where I be, speshally in the first part of the year, in the basket-work, and my wife she goes charring up at Mr. Carter's farm, and Mr. Dodson, him at the farther farm, he do give us a bit sometimes. Ef you git us turned away it will be a bad day's work for all on us, sir, you may take my word on it.'

'And my wife so ill, Mr. Elsmere,' said Sharland, 'and all those childer! I can't walk three miles farther to my work, Mr. Elsmere, I can't nohow. I have n't got the legs for it. Let un be, sir. We'll rub along.'

Robert tried to argue the matter.

If they would but stand by him he would fight the matter through, and they should not suffer, if he had to get up a public subscription, or support them out of his own pocket all the winter. A bold front, and Mr. Henslowe must give way. The law was on their side, and every labourer in Surrey would be the better off for their refusal to be housed like pigs and poisoned like vermin.

In vain. There is an inexhaustible store of cautious endurance in the poor against which the keenest reformer constantly throws himself in vain. Elsmere was beaten. The two men got his word, and shuffled off back to their pestilential hovels, a pathetic content beaming on each face.

THE SQUIRE

Catherine and Robert went back into the study. Rose heard her brother-in-law's passionate sigh as the door swung behind them.

'Defeated!' she said to herself with a curious accent. 'Well, everybody must have his turn. Robert has been too successful in his life, I think. — You wretch!' she added, after a minute, laying her bright head down on the book, before her.

Next morning his wife found Elsmere after breakfast busily packing a case of books in the study. They were books from the Hall library, which so far had been for months the inseparable companions of his historical work.

Catherine stood and watched him sadly.

'Must you, Robert?'

'I won't be beholden to that man for anything an hour longer than I can help,' he answered her.

When the packing was nearly finished he came up to where she stood in the open window.

'Things won't be as easy for us in the future, darling,' he said to her. 'A rector with both squire and agent against him is rather heavily handicapped. We must make up our minds to that.'

'I have no great fear,' she said, looking at him proudly.

'Oh, well — nor I — perhaps,' he admitted, after a moment. 'We can hold our own. But I wish — oh, I wish' — and he laid his hand on his wife's shoulder — 'I could have made friends with the squire.'

Catherine looked less responsive.

'As squire, Robert, or as Mr. Wendover?'

'As both, of course, but specially as Mr. Wendover.'

ROBERT ELSMERE

‘We can do without his friendship,’ she said with energy.

Robert gave a great stretch, as though to work off his regrets.

‘Ah, but,’ he said, half to himself, as his arms dropped, ‘if you are just filled with the hunger to *know*, the people who know as much as the squire become very interesting to you!’

Catherine did not answer. But probably her heart went out once more in protest against a knowledge that was to her but a form of revolt against the awful powers of man’s destiny.

‘However, here go his books,’ said Robert.

Two days later Mrs. Leyburn and Agnes made their appearance, Mrs. Leyburn all in a flutter concerning the event over which, in her own opinion, she had come to preside. In her gentle fluid mind all impressions were short-lived. She had forgotten how she had brought up her own babies, but Mrs. Thornburgh, who had never had any, had filled her full of nursery lore. She sat retailing a host of second-hand hints and instructions to Catherine, who would every now and then lay her hand smiling on her mother’s knee, well pleased to see the flush of pleasure on the pretty old face, and ready, in her patient filial way, to let herself be experimented on to the utmost, if it did but make the poor foolish thing happy.

Then came a night when every soul in the quiet rectory, even hot, smarting Rose, was possessed by one thought through many terrible hours, and one only — the thought of Catherine’s safety. It was

THE SQUIRE

strange and unexpected, but Catherine, the most normal and healthy of women, had a hard struggle for her own life and her child's, and it was not till the grey autumn morning, after a day and night which left a permanent mark on Robert, that he was summoned at last, and with the sense of one emerging from black gulfs of terror, received from his wife's languid hand the tiny fingers of his first-born.

The days that followed were full of emotion for these two people, who were perhaps always over-serious, over-sensitive. They had no idea of minimising the great common experiences of life. Both of them were really simple, brought up in old-fashioned simple ways, easily touched, responsive to all that high spiritual education which flows from the familiar incidents of the human story, approached poetically and passionately. As the young husband sat in the quiet of his wife's room, the occasional restless movements of the small brown head against her breast causing the only sound perceptible in the country silence, he felt all the deep familiar currents of human feeling sweeping through him — love, reverence, thanksgiving — and all the walls of the soul, as it were, expanding and enlarging as they passed.

Responsive creature that he was, the experience of these days was hardly happiness. It went too deep; it brought him too poignantly near to all that is most real and therefore most tragic in life.

Catherine's recovery also was slower than might have been expected, considering her constitutional soundness, and for the first week, after that faint moment of joy when her child was laid upon her arm, and

she saw her husband's quivering face above her, there was a kind of depression hovering over her. Robert felt it, and felt too that all his devotion could not soothe it away. At last she said to him one evening, in the encroaching September twilight, speaking with a sudden hurrying vehemence, wholly unlike herself, as though a barrier of reserve had given way, —

‘Robert, I cannot put it out of my head. I cannot forget it, *the pain of the world!*’

He shut the book he was reading, her hand in his, and bent over her with questioning eyes.

‘It seems,’ she went on, with that difficulty which a strong nature always feels in self-revelation, ‘to take the joy even out of our love — and the child. I feel ashamed almost that mere physical pain should have laid such hold on me — and yet I can’t get away from it. It’s not for myself,’ and she smiled faintly at him. ‘Comparatively I had so little to bear! But I know now for the first time what physical pain may mean — and I never knew before! I lie thinking, Robert, about all creatures in pain — workmen crushed by machinery, or soldiers — or poor things in hospitals — above all of women! Oh, when I get well, how I will take care of the women here! What women must suffer even here in out-of-the-way cottages — no doctor, no kind nursing, all blind agony and struggle! And women in London in dens like those Mr. Newcome got into, degraded, forsaken, ill-treated, the thought of the child only an extra horror and burden! And the pain all the time so merciless, so cruel — no escape! Oh, to give all one is, or ever can be, to comforting! And yet the great sea of

THE SQUIRE

it one can never touch! It is a nightmare — I am weak still, I suppose; I don't know myself; but I can see nothing but jarred, tortured creatures everywhere. All my own joys and comforts seem to lift me selfishly above the common lot.'

She stopped, her large grey-blue eyes dim with tears, trying once more for that habitual self-restraint which physical weakness had shaken.

'You *are* weak,' he said, caressing her, 'and that destroys for a time the normal balance of things. It is true, darling, but we are not meant to see it always so clearly. God knows we could not bear it if we did.'

'And to think,' she said, shuddering a little, 'that there are men and women who in the face of it can still refuse Christ and the Cross, can still say this life is all! How can they live — how dare they live?'

Then he saw that not only man's pain, but man's defiance, had been haunting her, and he guessed what persons and memories had been flitting through her mind. But he dared not talk lest she should exhaust herself. Presently, seeing a volume of Augustine's 'Confessions,' her favourite book, lying beside her, he took it up, turning over the pages, and weaving passages together as they caught his eye.

'Speak to me, for Thy compassion's sake, O Lord my God, and tell me what art Thou to me! Say unto my soul, "I am thy salvation!" Speak it that I may hear. Behold the ears of my heart, O Lord; open them and say unto my soul, "I am thy salvation!" I will follow after this voice of Thine, I will lay hold on Thee. The temple of my soul, wherein Thou shouldest enter, is narrow, do Thou enlarge it. It falleth into ruins — do Thou

rebuild it ! . . . Woe to that bold soul which hopeth, if it do but let Thee go, to find something better than Thee ! It turneth hither and thither, on this side and on that, and all things are hard and bitter unto it. For Thou only art rest ! . . . Whithersoever the soul of man turneth it findeth sorrow, except only in Thee. Fix there, then, thy resting-place, my soul ! Lay up in Him whatever thou hast received from Him. Commend to the keeping of the Truth whatever the Truth hath given thee, and thou shalt lose nothing. And thy dead things shall revive and thy weak things shall be made whole !'

She listened, appropriating and clinging to every word, till the nervous clasp of the long delicate fingers relaxed, her head dropped a little, gently, against the head of the child, and tired with much feeling she slept.

Robert slipped away and strolled out into the garden in the fast-gathering darkness. His mind was full of that intense spiritual life of Catherine's which in its wonderful self-containedness and strength was always a marvel, sometimes a reproach, to him. Beside her, he seemed to himself a light creature, drawn hither and thither by this interest and by that, tangled in the fleeting shows of things — the toy and plaything of circumstance. He thought ruefully and humbly, as he wandered on through the dusk, of his own lack of inwardness: 'Everything divides me from Thee!' he could have cried in St. Augustine's manner. 'Books, and friends, and work — all seem to hide Thee from me. Why am I so passionate for this and that, for all these sections and fragments of Thee? Oh, for the One, the All! Fix there thy resting-place, my soul!'

THE SQUIRE

And presently, after this cry of self-reproach, he turned to muse on that intuition of the world's pain which had been troubling Catherine, shrinking from it even more than she had shrunk from it, in proportion as his nature was more imaginative than hers. And Christ the only clue, the only remedy — no other anywhere in this vast universe, where all men are under sentence of death, where the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now!

And yet what countless generations of men had borne their pain, knowing nothing of the one Healer. He thought of Buddhist patience and Buddhist charity; of the long centuries during which Chaldean or Persian or Egyptian lived, suffered, and died, trusting the gods they knew. And how many other generations, nominally children of the Great Hope, had used it as the mere instrument of passion or of hate, cursing in the name of love, destroying in the name of pity! For how much of the world's pain was not Christianity itself responsible? His thoughts recurred with a kind of anguished perplexity to some of the problems stirred in him of late by his historical reading. The strifes and feuds and violences of the early Church returned to weigh upon him — the hair-splitting superstition, the selfish passion for power. He recalled Gibbon's lamentation over the age of the Antonines, and Mommsen's grave doubt whether, taken as a whole, the area once covered by the Roman Empire can be said to be substantially happier now than in the days of Severus.

O corruptio optimi! That men should have been so little affected by that shining ideal of the New Jeru-

salem, 'descended out of Heaven from God,' into their very midst — that the print of the 'blessed feet' along the world's highway should have been so often buried in the sands of cruelty and fraud!

The September wind blew about him as he strolled through the darkening column, set thick with great bushes of sombre juniper among the yellowing fern, which stretched away on the left-hand side of the road leading to the Hall. He stood and watched the masses of restless discordant cloud which the sunset had left behind it, thinking the while of Mr. Grey, of his assertions and his denials. Certain phrases of his which Robert had heard drop from him on one or two rare occasions during the later stages of his Oxford life ran through his head.

'*The fairy-tale of Christianity*' — '*The origins of Christian Mythology*.' He could recall, as the words rose in his memory, the simplicity of the rugged face, and the melancholy mingled with fire which had always marked the great tutor's sayings about religion.

'*Fairy-tale!*' Could any reasonable man watch a life like Catherine's and believe that nothing but a delusion lay at the heart of it? And as he asked the question, he seemed to hear Mr. Grey's answer: 'All religions are true, and all are false. In them all, more or less visibly, man grasps at the one thing needful — self forsaken, God laid hold of. The spirit in them all is the same, answers eternally to reality; it is but the letter, the fashion, the imagery, that are relative and changing.'

He turned and walked homeward, struggling, with a host of tempestuous ideas as swift and varying as the

THE SQUIRE

autumn clouds hurrying overhead. And then, through a break in a line of trees, he caught sight of the tower and chancel window of the little church. In an instant he had a vision of early summer mornings — dewy, perfumed, silent, save for the birds, and all the soft stir of rural birth and growth, of a chancel fragrant with many flowers, of a distant church with scattered figures, of the kneeling form of his wife close beside him, himself bending over her, the sacrament of the Lord's death in his hand. The emotion, the intensity, the absolute self-surrender of innumerable such moments in the past — moments of a common faith, a common self-abasement — came flooding back upon him. With a movement of joy and penitence he threw himself at the feet of Catherine's Master and his own: *'Fix there thy resting-place, my soul!'*

CHAPTER XX

CATHERINE'S later convalescence dwelt in her mind in after years as a time of peculiar softness and peace. Her baby-girl thrived; Robert had driven the squire and Henslowe out of his mind, and was all eagerness as to certain negotiations with a famous naturalist for a lecture at the village club. At Mile End, as though to put the rector in the wrong, serious illness had for the time disappeared; and Mrs. Leyburn's mild chatter, as she gently poked about the house and garden, went out in Catherine's pony-carriage, inspected Catherine's stores, and hovered over Catherine's babe, had a constantly cheering effect on the still languid mother. Like all theorists, especially those at second-hand, Mrs. Leyburn's maxims had been very much routed by the event. The babe had ailments she did not understand, or it developed likes and dislikes she had forgotten existed in babies, and Mrs. Leyburn was nonplussed. She would sit with it on her lap, anxiously studying its peculiarities. She was sure it squinted, that its back was weaker than other babies, that it cried more than hers had ever done. She loved to be plaintive; it would have seemed to her unlady-like to be too cheerful, even over a first grandchild.

Agnes meanwhile made herself practically useful, as was her way, and she did almost more than anybody to beguile Catherine's recovery by her hours of Long Whindale chat. She had no passionate feeling about the place and the people as Catherine had, but

THE SQUIRE

she was easily content, and she had a good wholesome feminine curiosity as to the courtings and weddings and burials of the human beings about her. So she would sit and chat, working the while with the quickest, neatest of fingers, till Catherine knew as much about Jenny Tyson's Whinborough lover, and Farmer Tredall's troubles with his son, and the way in which that odious woman Molly Redgold bullied her little consumptive husband, as Agnes knew, which was saying a good deal.

About themselves Agnes was frankness itself.

'Since you went,' she would say, with a shrug, 'I keep the coach steady, perhaps, but Rose drives, and we shall have to go where she takes us. By the way, Cathie, what have you been doing to her here? She is not a bit like herself. I don't generally mind being snubbed. It amuses her and does n't hurt me; and, of course, I know I am meant to be her foil. But, really, sometimes she is too bad even for me.'

Catherine sighed, but held her peace. Like all strong persons, she kept things very much to herself. It only made vexations more real to talk about them. But she and Agnes discussed the winter and Berlin.

'You had better let her go,' said Agnes significantly; 'she will go anyhow.'

A few days afterwards Catherine, opening the drawing-room door unexpectedly, came upon Rose sitting idly at the piano, her hands resting on the keys, and her great grey eyes straining out of her white face with an expression which sent the sister's heart into her shoes.

'How you steal about, Catherine!' cried the player,

getting up and shutting the piano. 'I declare you are just like Millais's Grey Lady in that ghostly gown.'

Catherine came swiftly across the floor. She had just left her child, and the sweet dignity of motherhood was in her step, her look. She came and threw her arms round the girl.

'Rose, dear, I have settled it all with mamma. The money can be managed, and you shall go to Berlin for the winter when you like.'

She drew herself back a little, still with her arms round Rose's waist, and looked at her smiling, to see how she took it.

Rose had a strange movement of irritation. She drew herself out of Catherine's grasp.

'I don't know that I had settled on Berlin,' she said coldly. 'Very possibly Leipsic would be better.'

Catherine's face fell.

'Whichever you like, dear. I have been thinking about it ever since that day you spoke of it — you remember — and now I have talked it over with mamma. If she can't manage all the expense we will help. Oh, Rose,' and she came nearer again, timidly, her eyes melting, 'I know we have n't understood each other. I have been ignorant, I think, and narrow. But I meant it for the best, dear — I did —'

Her voice failed her, but in her look there seemed to be written the history of all the prayers and yearnings of her youth over the pretty wayward child who had been her joy and torment. Rose could not but meet that look — its nobleness, its humble surrender.

Suddenly two large tears rolled down her cheeks. She dashed them away impatiently.

THE SQUIRE

‘I am not a bit well,’ she said, as though in irritable excuse both to herself and Catherine. ‘I believe I have had a headache for a fortnight.’

And then she put her arms down on a table near and hid her face upon them. She was one bundle of jarring nerves — sore, poor passionate child, that she was betraying herself; sorer still that, as she told herself, Catherine was sending her to Berlin as a consolation. When girls have love-troubles the first thing their elders do is to look for a diversion. She felt sick and humiliated. Catherine had been talking her over with the family, she supposed.

Meanwhile Catherine stood by her tenderly, stroking her hair and saying soothing things.

‘I am sure you will be happy at Berlin, Rose. And you must n’t leave me out of your life, dear, though I am so stupid and unmusical. You must write to me about all you do. We must begin a new time. Oh, I feel so guilty sometimes,’ she went on, falling into a low intensity of voice that startled Rose, and made her look hurriedly up. ‘I fought against your music, I suppose, because I thought it was devouring you — leaving no room for — for religion — for God. I was jealous of it for Christ’s sake. And all the time I was blundering! Oh, Rose,’ and she sank on her knees beside the chair, resting her head against the girl’s shoulder, ‘papa charged me to make you love God, and I torture myself with thinking that, instead, it has been my doing, my foolish clumsy doing, that you have come to think religion dull and hard. Oh, my darling, if I could make amends — if I could get you not to love your art less but to love it in God! Christ

is the first reality; all things else are real and lovely in Him. Oh, I have been frightening you away from Him! I ought to have drawn you near. I have been so — so silent, so shut up, I have never tried to make you feel what it was kept *me* at His feet! Oh, Rose, darling, you think the world real, and pleasure and enjoyment real. But if I could have made you see and know the things I have seen up in the mountains — among the poor, the dying — you would have *felt* Him saving, redeeming, interceding, as I did. Oh, then you *must*, you *would* have known that Christ only is real, that our joys can only truly exist in Him. I should have been more open — more faithful — more humble.'

She paused with a long quivering sigh. Rose suddenly lifted herself, and they fell into each other's arms.

Rose, shaken and excited, thought, of course, of that night at Burwood, when she had won leave to go to Manchester. This scene was the sequel to that — the next stage in one and the same process. Her feeling was much the same as that of the naturalist who comes close to any of the hidden operations of life. She had come near to Catherine's spirit in the growing. Beside that sweet expansion, how poor and feverish and earth-stained the poor child felt herself!

But there were many currents in Rose — many things striving for the mastery. She kissed Catherine once or twice, then she drew herself back suddenly, looking into the other's face. A great wave of feeling rushed up and broke.

'Catherine, could you ever have married a man that did not believe in Christ?'

THE SQUIRE

She flung the question out — a kind of morbid curiosity, a wild wish to find an outlet of some sort for things pent up in her, driving her on.

Catherine started. But she met Rose's half-frowning eyes steadily.

‘Never, Rose! To me it would not be marriage.’

The child's face lost its softness. She drew one hand away.

‘What have we to do with it?’ she cried. ‘Each one for himself.’

‘But marriage makes two one,’ said Catherine, pale, but with a firm clearness. ‘And if husband and wife are only one in body and estate, not one in soul, why, who that believes in the soul would accept such a bond, endure such a miserable second-best?’

She rose. But though her voice had recovered all its energy, her attitude, her look was still tenderness, still yearning itself.

‘Religion does not fill up the soul,’ said Rose slowly. Then she added carelessly, a passionate red flying into her cheek against her will, ‘However, I cannot imagine any question that interests me personally less. I was curious what you would say.’

And she too got up, drawing her hand lightly along the keyboard of the piano. Her pose had a kind of defiance in it; her knit brows forbade Catherine to ask questions. Catherine stood irresolute. Should she throw herself on her sister, imploring her to speak, opening her own heart on the subject of this wild unhappy fancy for a man who would never think again of the child he had played with?

But the North-country dread of words, of speech

that only defines and magnifies, prevailed. Let there be no words, but let her love and watch.

So, after a moment's pause, she began in a different tone upon the inquiries she had been making, the arrangements that would be wanted for this musical winter. Rose was almost listless at first. A stranger would have thought she was being persuaded into something against her will. But she could not keep it up. The natural instinct reasserted itself, and she was soon planning and deciding as sharply, and with as much young omniscience, as usual.

By the evening it was settled. Mrs. Leyburn, much bewildered, asked Catherine doubtfully, the last thing at night, whether she wanted Rose to be a professional. Catherine exclaimed.

'But, my dear,' said the widow, staring pensively into her bedroom fire, 'what's she to do with all this music?' Then after a second she added half-severely, 'I don't believe her father would have liked it; I don't, indeed, Catherine!'

Poor Catherine smiled and sighed in the background, but made no reply.

'However, she never looks so pretty as when she's playing the violin — never!' said Mrs. Leyburn presently in the distance, with a long breath of satisfaction. 'She's got such a lovely hand and arm, Catherine! They're prettier than mine, and even your father used to notice mine.'

'*Even.*' The word had a little sound of bitterness. In spite of all his love, had the gentle puzzle-headed woman found her unearthly husband often very hard to live with?

THE SQUIRE

Rose meanwhile was sitting up in bed, with her hands round her knees, dreaming. So she had got her heart's desire! There did not seem to be much joy in the getting, but that was the way of things, one was told. She knew she should hate the Germans — great, bouncing, over-fed, sentimental creatures!

Then her thoughts ran into the future. After six months — yes, by April — she would be home, and Agnes and her mother could meet her in London. *London*. Ah, it was London she was thinking of all the time, not Berlin! She could not stay in the present; or rather the Rose of the present went straining to the Rose of the future, asking to be righted, to be avenged.

‘I will learn — I will learn fast — many things besides music!’ she said to herself feverishly. ‘By April I shall be *much* cleverer. Oh, *then* I won’t be a fool so easily. We shall be sure to meet, of course. But he shall find out that it was only a *child*, only a silly soft-hearted baby he played with down here. I shan’t care for him in the least, of course not, not after six months. I don’t *mean* to. And I will make him know it — oh, I will, though he is so wise, and so much older, and mounts on such stilts when he pleases!’

So once more Rose flung her defiance at fate. But when Catherine came along the passage an hour later she heard low sounds from Rose’s room, which ceased abruptly as her step drew near. The elder sister paused; her eyes filled with tears; her hand closed indignantly. Then she came closer, all but went in, thought better of it, and moved away. If there is any truth in brain-waves, Langham should have slept restlessly that night.

ROBERT ELSMERE

Ten days later an escort had been found, all preparations had been made, and Rose was gone.

Mrs. Leyburn and Agnes lingered a while, and then they too departed under an engagement to come back after Christmas for a long stay, that Mrs. Leyburn might cheat the Northern spring a little.

So husband and wife were alone again. How they relished their solitude! Catherine took up many threads of work which her months of comparative weakness had forced her to let drop. She taught vigorously in the school; in the afternoons, so far as her child would let her, she carried her tender presence and her practical knowledge of nursing to the sick and feeble; and on two evenings in the week she and Robert threw open a little room there was on the ground-floor between the study and the dining-room to the women and girls of the village, as a sort of drawing-room. Hard-worked mothers would come, who had put their fretful babes to sleep, and given their lords to eat, and had just energy left, while the eldest daughter watched, and the men were at the club or the 'Blue Boar,' to put on a clean apron and climb the short hill to the rectory. Once there, there was nothing to think of for an hour but the bright room, Catherine's kind face, the rector's jokes, and the illustrated papers or the photographs that were spread out for them to look at if they would. The girls learned to come, because Catherine could teach them a simple dressmaking, and was clever in catching stray persons to set them singing; and because Mr. Elsmere read exciting stories, and because nothing any one of them ever told Mrs. Elsmere was

THE SQUIRE

forgotten by her, or failed to interest her. Any of her social equals of the neighbourhood would have hardly recognised the reserved and stately Catherine on these occasions. Here she felt herself at home, at ease. She would never, indeed, have Robert's pliancy, his quick divination, and for some time after her transplanting, the North-country woman had found it very difficult to suit herself to a new shade of local character. But she was learning from Robert every day; she watched him among the poor, recognising all his gifts with a humble intensity of admiring love, which said little but treasured everything, and for herself her inward happiness and peace shone through her quiet ways, making her the mother and the friend of all about her.

As for Robert, he, of course, was living at high pressure all round. Outside his sermons and his school, his Natural History Club had perhaps most of his heart, and the passion for science, little continuous work as he was able to give it, grew on him more and more. He kept up as best he could, working with one hand, so to speak, when he could not spare two, and in his long rambles over moor and hill, gathering in with his quick eye a harvest of local fact wherewith to feed their knowledge and his own.

The mornings he always spent at work among his books, the afternoons in endless tramps over the parish, sometimes alone, sometimes with Catherine; and in the evenings, if Catherine was 'at home' twice a week to womankind, he had his nights when his study became the haunt and prey of half the boys in the place, who were free of everything, as soon as he had

taught them to respect his books, and not to taste his medicines; other nights when he was lecturing or story-telling in the club or in some outlying hamlet; or others again, when with Catherine beside him he would sit trying to think some of that religious passion which burned in both their hearts, into clear words or striking illustrations for his sermons.

Then his choir was much upon his mind. He knew nothing about music, nor did Catherine; their efforts made Rose laugh irreverently when she got their letters at Berlin. But Robert believed in a choir chiefly as an excellent social and centralising instrument. There had been none in Mr. Preston's day. He was determined to have one, and a good one, and by sheer energy he succeeded, delighting in his boyish way over the opposition some of his novelties excited among the older and more stiff-backed inhabitants.

'Let them talk,' he would say brightly to Catherine. 'They will come round; and talk is good. Anything to make them think, to stir the pool!'

Of course that old problem of the agricultural labourer weighed upon him — his grievances, his wants. He went about pondering the English land system, more than half-inclined one day to sink part of his capital in a peasant-proprietor experiment, and ingulfed the next in all the moral and economical objections to the French system. Land for allotments, at any rate, he had set his heart on. But in this direction, as in many others, the way was barred. All the land in the parish was the squire's, and not one inch of the squire's land would Henslowe let young Elsmere have anything to do with if he knew it. He would neither

THE SQUIRE

repair nor enlarge the Workmen's Institute; and he had a way of forgetting the squire's customary subscriptions to parochial objects, always paid through him, which gave him much food for chuckling whenever he passed Elsmere in the country lanes. The man's coarse insolence and mean hatred made themselves felt at every turn, besmirching and embittering.

Still it was very true that neither Henslowe nor the squire could do Robert much harm. His hold on the parish was visibly strengthening; his sermons were not only filling the church with his own parishioners, but attracting hearers from the districts round Murewell, so that even on these winter Sundays there was almost always a sprinkling of strange faces among the congregation; and his position in the county and diocese was becoming every month more honourable and important. The gentry about showed them much kindness, and would have shown them much hospitality if they had been allowed. But though Robert had nothing of the ascetic about him, and liked the society of his equals as much as most good-tempered and vivacious people do, he and Catherine decided that for the present they had no time to spare for visits and county society. Still, of course, there were many occasions on which the routine of their life brought them across their neighbours, and it began to be pretty widely recognised that Elsmere was a young fellow of unusual promise and intelligence, that his wife too was remarkable, and that between them they were likely to raise the standard of clerical effort considerably in their part of Surrey.

ROBERT ELSMERE

All the factors of this life — his work, his influence, his recovered health, the lavish beauty of the country — Elsmere enjoyed with all his heart. But at the root of all there lay what gave value and savour to everything else — that exquisite home-life of theirs, that tender, triple bond of husband, wife, and child.

Catherine, coming home tired from teaching or visiting, would find her step quickening as she reached the gate of the rectory, and the sense of delicious possession waking up in her, which is one of the first fruits of motherhood. There, at the window, between the lamplight behind and the winter dusk outside, would be the child in its nurse's arms, little wondering motiveless smiles passing over the tiny puckered face that was so oddly like Robert's already. And afterwards, in the fire-lit nursery, with the bath in front of the high fender, and all the necessities of baby-life beside it, she would go through those functions which mothers love and linger over, let the kicking dimpled creature principally concerned protest as it may against the over-refinements of civilisation. Then, when the little restless voice was stilled, and the cradle left silent in the darkened room, there would come the short watching for Robert, his voice, his kiss, their simple meal together, a moment of rest, of laughter and chat, before some fresh effort claimed them. Every now and then — white-letter days — there would drop on the rare long evening together. Then out would come one of the few books — Dante or Virgil or Milton — which had entered into the fibre of Catherine's strong nature. The two heads would draw close over them, or Robert would take some thought of hers as a text,

THE SQUIRE

and spout away from the hearthrug, watching all the while for her smile, her look of assent. Sometimes, late at night, when there was a sermon on his mind, he would dive into his pocket for his Greek Testament and make her read, partly for the sake of teaching her — for she knew some Greek and longed to know more — but mostly that he might get from her some of that garnered wealth of spiritual experience which he adored in her. They would go from verse to verse, from thought to thought, till suddenly perhaps the tide of feeling would rise, and while the wind swept round the house, and the owls hooted in the elms, they would sit hand in hand, lost in love and faith — Christ near them — Eternity, warm with God, enwrapping them.

So much for the man of action, the husband, the philanthropist. In reality, great as was the moral energy of this period of Elsmere's life, the dominant distinguishing note of it was not moral but intellectual.

In matters of conduct he was but developing habits and tendencies already strongly present in him; in matters of thinking, with every month of this winter he was becoming conscious of fresh forces, fresh hunger, fresh horizons.

'One half of your day be the king of your world,' Mr. Grey had said to him; 'the other half be the slave of something which will take you out of your world, into the general life, the life of thought, of man as a whole, of the universe.'

The counsel, as we have seen, had struck root and flowered into action. So many men of Elsmere's type

give themselves up once and for all as they become mature to the life of doing and feeling, practically excluding the life of thought. It was Henry Grey's influence in all probability, perhaps, too, the training of an earlier Langham, that saved for Elsmere the life of thought.

The form taken by this training of his own mind he had been thus encouraged not to abandon, was, as we know, the study of history. He had well mapped out before him that book on the origins of France which he had described to Langham. It was to take him years, of course, and meanwhile, in his first enthusiasm, he was like a child, revelling in the treasure of work that lay before him. As he had told Langham, he had just got below the surface of a great subject and was beginning to dig into the roots of it. Hitherto he had been under the guidance of men of his own day, of the nineteenth-century historian, who refashions the past on the lines of his own mind, who gives it rationality, coherence, and, as it were, modernness, so that the main impression he produces on us, so long as we look at that past through him only, is on the whole an impression of *continuity*, of *resemblance*.

Whereas, on the contrary, the first impression left on a man by the attempt to plunge into the materials of history for himself is almost always an extraordinarily sharp impression of *difference*, of *contrast*. Ultimately, of course, he sees that these men and women whose letters and biographies, whose creeds and general conceptions he is investigating, are in truth his ancestors, bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh. But at first the student who goes back, say, in the history of

THE SQUIRE

Europe, behind the Renaissance or behind the Crusades into the actual deposits of the past, is often struck with a kind of *vertige*. The men and women whom he has dragged forth into the light of his own mind are to him like some strange puppet-show. They are called by names he knows — kings, bishops, judges, poets, priests, men of letters — but what a gulf between him and them! What motives, what beliefs, what embryonic processes of thought and morals, what bizarre combinations of ignorance and knowledge, of the highest sanctity with the lowest credulity or falsehood; what extraordinary prepossessions, born with a man and tainting his whole ways of seeing and thinking from childhood to the grave! Amid all the intellectual dislocation of the spectacle, indeed, he perceives certain Greeks and certain Latins who represent a forward strain, who belong as it seems to a world of their own, a world ahead of them. To them he stretches out his hand: ‘*You*,’ he says to them, ‘though your priests spoke to you not of Christ, but of Zeus and Artemis, *you* are really my kindred!’ But intellectually they stand alone. Around them, after them, for long ages the world ‘spake as a child, felt as a child, understood as a child.’

Then he sees what it is that makes the difference, digs the gulf. ‘*Science*,’ the mind cries, ‘*ordered knowledge*.’ And so for the first time the modern recognises what the accumulations of his forefathers have done for him. He takes the torch which man has been so long and patiently fashioning to his hand, and turns it on the past, and at every step the sight grows stranger, and yet more moving, more pathetic. The darkness into

ROBERT ELSMERE

which he penetrates does but make him grasp his own guiding light the more closely. And yet, bit by bit, it has been prepared for him by these groping half-conscious generations, and the scrutiny which began in repulsion and laughter ends in a marvelling gratitude.

But the repulsion and the laughter come first, and during this winter of work Elsmere felt them both very strongly. He would sit in the morning buried among the records of decaying Rome and emerging France, surrounded by Chronicles, by Church Councils, by Lives of the Saints, by primitive systems of law, pushing his imaginative impetuous way through them. Sometimes Catherine would be there, and he would pour out on her something of what was in his own mind.

One day he was deep in the Life of a certain saint. The saint had been bishop of a diocese in Southern France. His biographer was his successor in the see, a man of high political importance in the Burgundian state, renowned besides for sanctity and learning. Only some twenty years separated the biography, at the latest, from the death of its subject. It contained some curious material for social history, and Robert was reading it with avidity. But it was, of course, a tissue of marvels. The young bishop had practised every virtue known to the time, and wrought every conceivable miracle, and the miracles were better told than usual, with more ingenuity, more imagination. Perhaps on that account they struck the reader's sense more sharply.

‘And the saint said to the sorcerers and to the prac-

THE SQUIRE

tisers of unholy arts, that they should do those evil things no more, for he had bound the spirits of whom they were wont to inquire, and they would get no further answers to their incantations. Then those stiff-necked sons of the Devil fell upon the man of God, scourged him sore, and threatened him with death, if he would not instantly loose those spirits he had bound. And seeing he could prevail nothing, and being, moreover, admonished by God so to do, he permitted them to work their own damnation. For he called for a parchment and wrote upon it, "*Ambrose unto Satan—Enter!*" Then was the spell loosed, the spirits returned, the sorcerers inquired as they were accustomed, and received answers. But in a short space of time every one of them perished miserably and was delivered unto his natural lord Satan, whereunto he belonged.'

Robert made a hasty exclamation, and turning to Catherine, who was working beside him, read the passage to her, with a few words as to the book and its author.

Catherine's work dropped a moment on to her knee. 'What extraordinary superstition!' she said, startled. 'A bishop, Robert, and an educated man?'

Robert nodded.

'But it is the whole habit of mind,' he said half to himself, staring into the fire, 'that is so astounding. No one escapes it. The whole age really is non-sane.'

'I suppose the devout Catholic would believe that?'

'I am not sure,' said Robert dreamily, and remained sunk in thought for long after, while Catherine worked, and pondered a Christmas entertainment for her girls.

ROBERT ELSMERE

Perhaps it was his scientific work, fragmentary as it was, that was really quickening and sharpening these historical impressions of his. Evolution — once a mere germ in the mind — was beginning to press, to encroach, to intermeddle with the mind's other furniture. And the comparative instinct — that tool, *par excellence*, of modern science — was at last fully awake, was growing fast, taking hold, now here, now there.

'It is tolerably clear to me,' he said to himself suddenly one winter afternoon, as he was trudging home alone from Mile End, 'that some day or other I must set to work to bring a little order into one's notions of the Old Testament. At present they are just a chaos!'

He walked on a while, struggling with the rainstorm which had overtaken him, till again the mind's quick life took voice.

'But what matter? God in the beginning — God in the prophets — in Israel's best life — God in Christ! How are any theories about the Pentateuch to touch that?'

And into the clear eyes, the young face aglow with wind and rain, there leapt a light, a softness indescribable.

But the vivider and the keener grew this new mental life of Elsmere's, the more constant became his sense of soreness as to that foolish and motiveless quarrel which divided him from the squire. Naturally he was for ever being harassed and pulled up in his work by the mere loss of the Murewell library. To have such a collection so close, and to be cut off from it, was a state of things no student could help feeling severely.

THE SQUIRE

But it was much more than that: it was the man he hankered after; the man who was a master where he was a beginner; the man who had given his life to learning, and was carrying all his vast accumulations sombrely to the grave, unused, untransmitted.

‘He might have given me his knowledge,’ thought Elsmere sadly, ‘and I — I — would have been a son to him. Why is life so perverse?’

Meanwhile he was as much cut off from the great house and its master as though both had been surrounded by the thorn hedge of fairy-tale. The Hall had its visitors during these winter months, but the Elsmeres saw nothing of them. Robert gulped down a natural sigh when one Saturday evening, as he passed the Hall gates, he saw driving through them the chief of English science side by side with the most accomplished of English critics.

“‘There are good times in the world and I ain’t in ’em!’” he said to himself with a laugh and a shrug as he turned up the lane to the rectory, and then, boy-like, was ashamed of himself, and greeted Catherine with all the tenderer greeting.

Only on two occasions during three months could he be sure of having seen the squire. Both were in the twilight, when, as the neighbourhood declared, Mr. Wendover always walked, and both made a sharp impression on the rector’s nerves. In the heart of one of the loneliest commons of the parish Robert, swinging along one November evening through the scattered furze bushes, growing ghostly in the darkness, was suddenly conscious of a cloaked figure with slouching shoulders and head bent forward coming towards him.

ROBERT ELSMERE

It passed without recognition of any kind, and for an instant Robert caught the long sharpened features and haughty eyes of the squire.

At another time Robert was walking, far from home, along a bit of level road. The pools in the ruts were just filmed with frost, and gleamed under the sunset; the winter dusk was clear and chill. A horseman turned into the road from a side lane. It was the squire again, alone. The sharp sound of the approaching hoofs stirred Robert's pulse, and as they passed each other the rector raised his hat. He thought his greeting was acknowledged, but could not be quite sure. From the shelter of a group of trees he stood a moment and looked after the retreating figure. It and the horse showed dark against a wide sky barred by stormy reds and purples. The wind whistled through the withered oaks; the long road with its lines of glimmering pools seemed to stretch endlessly into the sunset; and with every minute the night strode on. Age and loneliness could have found no fitter setting. A shiver ran through Elsmere as he stepped forward.

Undoubtedly the quarrel, helped by his work, and the perpetual presence of that beautiful house commanding the whole country round it from its plateau above the river, kept Elsmere specially in mind of the squire. As before their first meeting, and in spite of it, he became more and more imaginatively preoccupied with him. One of the signs of it was a strong desire to read the squire's two famous books: one, 'The Idols of the Market-place,' an attack on English beliefs; the other, 'Essays on English Culture,' an attack on English ideals of education. He had never come across

THE SQUIRE

them as it happened, and perhaps Newcome's denunciation had some effect in inducing him for a time to refrain from reading them. But in December he ordered them and waited their coming with impatience. He said nothing of the order to Catherine; somehow there were by now two or three portions of his work, two or three branches of his thought, which had fallen out of their common discussion. After all she was not literary, and with all their oneness of soul there could not be an *identity* of interests or pursuits.

The books arrived in the morning. (Oh, how dismally well, with what a tightening of the heart, did Robert always remember that day in after years!) He was much too busy to look at them, and went off to a meeting. In the evening, coming home late from his night-school, he found Catherine tired, sent her to bed, and went himself into his study to put together some notes for a cottage lecture he was to give the following day. The packet of books, unopened, lay on his writing-table. He took off the wrapper, and in his eager way fell to reading the first he touched.

It was the first volume of 'The Idols of the Marketplace.'

Ten or twelve years before, Mr. Wendover had launched this book into a startled and protesting England. It had been the fruit of his first renewal of contact with English life and English ideas after his return from Berlin. Fresh from the speculative ferment of Germany and the far profaner scepticism of France, he had returned to a society where the first chapter of Genesis and the theory of verbal inspiration were still regarded as valid and important counters

on the board of thought. The result had been this book. In it each stronghold of English popular religion had been assailed in turn, at a time when English orthodoxy was a far more formidable thing than it is now.

The Pentateuch, the Prophets, the Gospels, St. Paul, Tradition, the Fathers, Protestantism and Justification by Faith, the Eighteenth Century, the Broad Church Movement, Anglican Theology—the squire had his say about them all. And while the coolness and frankness of the method sent a shock of indignation and horror through the religious public, the subtle and caustic style, and the epigrams with which the book was strewn, forced both the religious and irreligious public to read, whether they would or no. A storm of controversy rose round the volumes, and some of the keenest observers of English life had said at the time, and maintained since, that the publication of the book had made or marked an epoch.

Robert had lit on those pages in the Essay on the Gospels where the squire fell to analysing the evidence for the Resurrection, following up his analysis by an attempt at reconstructing the conditions out of which the belief in ‘the legend’ arose. Robert began to read vaguely at first, then to hurry on through page after page, still standing, seized at once by the bizarre power of the style, the audacity and range of the treatment.

Not a sound in the house. Outside, the tossing moaning December night; inside, the faintly crackling fire, the standing figure. Suddenly it was to Robert as though a cruel torturing hand were laid upon his inmost being. His breath failed him; the book slipped

THE SQUIRE

out of his grasp; he sank down upon his chair, his head in his hands. Oh, what a desolate intolerable moment! Over the young idealist soul there swept a dry destroying whirlwind of thought. Elements gathered from all sources — from his own historical work, from the squire's book, from the secret half-conscious recesses of the mind — entered into it, and as it passed it seemed to scorch the heart.

He stayed bowed there a while, then he roused himself with a half-groan, and hastily extinguishing his lamp he groped his way upstairs to his wife's room. Catherine lay asleep. The child, lost among its white coverings, slept too; there was a dim light over the bed, the books, the pictures. Beside his wife's pillow was a table on which there lay open her little Testament and the 'Imitation' her father had given her. Elsmere sank down beside her, appalled by the contrast between this soft religious peace and that black agony of doubt which still overshadowed him. He knelt there, restraining his breath lest it should wake her, wrestling piteously with himself, crying for pardon, for faith, feeling himself utterly unworthy to touch even the dear hand that lay so near him. But gradually the traditional forces of his life reasserted themselves. The horror lifted. Prayer brought comfort and a passionate healing self-abasement. 'Master, forgive — defend — purify,' cried the aching heart. '*There is none other that fighteth for us, but only Thou, O God!*'

He did not open the book again. Next morning he put it back into his shelves. If there were any Christian who could affront such an antagonist with

ROBERT ELSMERE

a light heart, he felt with a shudder of memory it was not he.

‘I have neither learning nor experience enough — yet,’ he said to himself slowly as he moved away; ‘of course it can be met, but *I* must grow, must think — first.’

And of that night’s wrestle he said not a word to any living soul. He did penance for it in the tenderest, most secret ways, but he shrank in misery from the thought of revealing it even to Catherine.

CHAPTER XXI

MEANWHILE the poor poisoned folk at Mile End lived and apparently throve, in defiance of all the laws of the universe. Robert, as soon as he found that radical measures were for the time hopeless, had applied himself with redoubled energy to making the people use such palliatives as were within their reach, and had preached boiled water and the removal of filth till, as he declared to Catherine, his dreams were one long sanitary nightmare. But he was not confiding enough to believe that the people paid much heed, and he hoped more from a dry hard winter than from any exertion either of his or theirs.

But, alas! with the end of November a season of furious rain set in.

Then Robert began to watch Mile End with anxiety, for so far every outbreak of illness there had followed upon unusual damp. But the rains passed, leaving behind them no worse results than the usual winter crop of lung ailments and rheumatism, and he breathed again.

Christmas came and went, and with the end of December the wet weather returned. Day after day rolling masses of southwest cloud came up from the Atlantic and wrapped the whole country in rain, which reminded Catherine of her Westmoreland rain more than any she had yet seen in the South. Robert accused her of liking it for that reason, but she shook her

ROBERT ELSMERE

head with a sigh, declaring that it was 'nothing without the becks.'

One afternoon she was shutting the door of the school behind her, and stepping out on the road skirting the green — the bedabbled wintry green — when she saw Robert emerging from the Mile End lane. She crossed over to him, wondering as she neared him that he seemed to take no notice of her. He was striding along, his wideawake over his eyes, and so absorbed that she had almost touched him before he saw her.

'Darling, is that you? Don't stop me, I am going to take the pony-carriage in for Meyrick. I have just come back from that accursed place; three cases of diphtheria in one house, Sharland's wife — and two others down with fever.'

She made a horrified exclamation.

'It will spread,' he said gloomily, 'I know it will. I never saw the children look such a ghastly crew before. Well, I must go for Meyrick and a nurse, and we must isolate and make a fight for it.'

In a few days the diphtheria epidemic in the hamlet had reached terrible proportions. There had been one death, others were expected, and soon Robert in his brief hours at home could find no relief in anything, so heavy was the oppression of the day's memories. At first Catherine for the child's sake kept away; but the little Mary was weaned, had a good Scotch nurse, was in every way thriving, and after a day or two Catherine's craving to help, to be with Robert in his trouble, was too strong to be withstood. But she dared not go backwards and forwards between her baby and the

THE SQUIRE

diphtheritic children. So she bethought herself of Mrs. Elsmere's servant, old Martha, who was still inhabiting Mrs. Elsmere's cottage till a tenant could be found for it, and doing good service meanwhile as an occasional parish nurse. The baby and its nurse went over to the cottage. Catherine carried the child there, wrapped close in maternal arms, and leaving her on old Martha's lap, went back to Robert.

Then she and he devoted themselves to a hand-to-hand fight with the epidemic. At the climax of it there were about twenty children down with it in different stages, and seven cases of fever. They had two hospital nurses; one of the better cottages, turned into a sanatorium, accommodated the worst cases under the nurses, and Robert and Catherine, directed by them and the doctors, took the responsibility of the rest, he helping to nurse the boys and she the girls. Of the fever cases Sharland's wife was the worst. A feeble creature at all times, it seemed almost impossible she could weather through. But day after day passed, and by dint of incessant nursing she still lived. A youth of twenty, the main support of a mother and five or six younger children, was also desperately ill. Robert hardly ever had him out of his thoughts, and the boy's dog-like affection for the rector, struggling with his deathly weakness, was like a perpetual exemplification of Ahriman and Ormuzd — the power of life struggling with the power of death.

It was a fierce fight. Presently it seemed to the husband and wife as though the few daily hours spent at the rectory were mere halts between successive acts of battle with the plague-fiend — a more real and grim

ROBERT ELSMERE

Grendel of the Marshes — for the lives of children. Catherine could always sleep in these intervals, quietly and dreamlessly; Robert very soon could only sleep by the help of some prescription of old Meyrick's. On all occasions of strain since his boyhood there had been signs in him of a certain lack of constitutional hardness which his mother knew very well, but which his wife was only just beginning to recognise. However, he laughed to scorn any attempt to restrain his constant goings and comings, or those hours of night-nursing, in which, as the hospital nurses were the first to admit, no one was so successful as the rector. And when he stood up on Sundays to preach in Murewell Church, the worn and spiritual look of the man, and the knowledge warm at each heart of those before him of how the rector not only talked but lived, carried every word home.

The strain upon all the moral and physical forces, however, strangely enough, came to Robert as a kind of relief. It broke through a tension of brain which of late had become an oppression. And for both him and Catherine these dark times had moments of intensest joy, points of white light illuminating heaven and earth. There were cloudy nights — wet, stormy January nights — when sometimes it happened to them to come back both together from the hamlet, Robert carrying a lantern, Catherine clothed in waterproof from head to foot, walking beside him, the rays flashing now on her face, now on the wooded sides of the lane, while the wind howled through the dark vault of branches overhead. And then, as they talked or were silent, suddenly a sense of the intense blessedness of

THE SQUIRE

this comradeship of theirs would rise like a flood in the man's heart, and he would fling his free arm round her, forcing her to stand a moment in the January night and storm while he said to her words of passionate gratitude, of faith in an immortal union reaching beyond change or death, lost in a kiss which was a sacrament. Then there were the moments when they saw their child, held high in Martha's arms at the window, and leaping towards her mother; the moments when one pallid sickly being after another was pronounced out of danger; and by the help of them the weeks passed away.

Nor were they left without help from outside. Lady Helen Varley no sooner heard the news than she hurried over. Robert, on his way one morning from one cottage to another, saw her pony-carriage in the lane. He hastened up to her before she could dismount.

'No, Lady Helen, you must n't come here,' he said to her peremptorily, as she held out her hand.

'Oh, Mr. Elsmere, let me. My boy is in town with his grandmother. Let me just go through, at any rate, and see what I can send you.'

Robert shook his head, smiling. A common friend of theirs and hers had once described this little lady to Elsmere by a French sentence which originally applied to the Duchesse de Choiseul. '*Une charmante petite fée sortie d'un œuf enchanté!*'—so it ran. Certainly, as Elsmere looked down upon her now, fresh from those squalid death-stricken hovels behind him, he was brought more abruptly than ever upon the contrasts of life. Lady Helen wore a green velvet and fur mantle,

ROBERT ELSMERE

in the production of which even Worth had felt some pride; a little green velvet bonnet perched on her fair hair; one tiny hand, ungloved, seemed ablaze with diamonds; there were opals and diamonds somewhere at her throat, gleaming among her sables. But she wore her jewels as carelessly as she wore her high birth, her quaint irregular prettiness, or the one or two brilliant gifts which made her sought after wherever she went. She loved her opals as she loved all bright things; if it pleased her to wear them in the morning, she wore them; and in five minutes she was capable of making the sourest puritan forget to frown on her and them. To Robert she always seemed the quintessence of breeding, of aristocracy, at their best. All her freaks, her sallies, her absurdities even, were graceful. At her freest and gayest there were things in her — restraints, reticences, perceptions — which implied behind her generations of rich, happy, important people, with ample leisure to cultivate all the more delicate niceties of social feeling and relation. Robert was often struck by the curious differences between her and Rose. Rose was far the handsomer; she was at least as clever; and she had a strong imperious will where Lady Helen had only impulses and sympathies and *engouements*. But Rose belonged to the class which struggles, where each individual depends on himself and knows it. Lady Helen had never struggled for anything — all the best things of the world were hers so easily that she hardly gave them a thought; or rather, what she had gathered without pain she held so lightly, she dispensed so lavishly, that men's eyes followed her, fluttering through life, with much

THE SQUIRE

the same feeling as was struck from Clough's radical hero by the peerless Lady Maria —

‘Live, be lovely, forget us, be beautiful, even to proudness,
Even for their poor sakes whose happiness is to behold you;
Live, be uncaring, be joyous, be sumptuous; only be lovely!’

‘Uncaring,’ however, little Lady Helen never was. If she was a fairy, she was a fairy all heart, all frank foolish smiles and tears.

‘No, Lady Helen — no,’ Robert said again. ‘This is no place for you, and we are getting on capitally.’

She pouted a little.

‘I believe you and Mrs. Elsmere are just killing yourselves all in a corner, with no one to see,’ she said indignantly. ‘If you won’t let me see, I shall send Sir Harry. But who’ — and her brown fawn’s eyes ran startled over the cottages before her — ‘who, Mr. Elsmere, does this *dreadful* place belong to?’

‘Mr. Wendover,’ said Robert shortly.

‘Impossible!’ she cried incredulously. ‘Why, I would n’t ask one of my dogs to sleep there,’ and she pointed to the nearest hovel, whereof the walls were tottering outwards, the thatch was falling to pieces, and the windows were mended with anything that came handy — rags, paper, or the crown of an old hat.

‘No, you would be ill advised,’ said Robert, looking with a bitter little smile at the sleek dachshund that sat blinking beside its mistress.

‘But what is the agent about?’

Then Robert told her the story, not mincing his words. Since the epidemic had begun, all that sense of imaginative attraction which had been reviving in

him towards the squire had been simply blotted out by a fierce heat of indignation. When he thought of Mr. Wendover now, he thought of him as the man to whom in strict truth it was owing that helpless children died in choking torture. All that agony of wrath and pity he had gone through in the last ten days sprang to his lips now as he talked to Lady Helen, and poured itself into his words.

‘Old Meyrick and I have taken things into our own hands now,’ he said at last briefly. ‘We have already made two cottages fairly habitable. To-morrow the inspector comes. I told the people yesterday I would n’t be bound by my promise a day longer. He must put the screw on Henslowe, and if Henslowe dawdles, why we shall just drain and repair and sink for a well ourselves. I can find the money somehow. At present we get all our water from one of the farms on the brow.’

‘Money!’ said Lady Helen impulsively, her looks warm with sympathy for the pale harassed young rector. ‘Sir Harry shall send you as much as you want. And anything else — blankets — coals?’

Out came her note-book, and Robert was drawn into a list. Then, full of joyfulness at being allowed to help, she gathered up her reins, she nodded her pretty little head at him, and was just starting off her ponies at full speed, equally eager ‘to tell Harry’ and to ransack Churton for the stores required, when it occurred to her to pull up again.

‘Oh, Mr. Elsmere, my aunt, Lady Charlotte, does nothing but talk about your sister-in-law. *Why* did you keep her all to yourself? Is it kind, is it neigh-

THE SQUIRE

bourly, to have such a wonder to stay with you and let nobody share?’

‘A wonder?’ said Robert, amused. ‘Rose plays the violin very well, but —’

‘As if relations ever saw one in proper perspective!’ exclaimed Lady Helen. ‘My aunt wants to be allowed to have her in town next season if you will all let her. I think she would find it fun. Aunt Charlotte knows all the world and his wife. And if I’m there, and Miss Leyburn will let me make friends with her, why, you know, *I* can just protect her a little from Aunt Charlotte!’

Next day Sir Harry Varley, a great burly country squire, who adored his wife, kept the hounds, owned a model estate, and thanked God every morning that he was an Englishman, rode over to Mile End. Robert, who had just been round the place with the inspector and was dead tired, had only energy to show him a few of the worst enormities. Sir Harry, leaving a cheque behind him, rode off with a discharge of strong language, at which Robert, clergyman as he was, only grimly smiled.

A few days later Mr. Wendover’s crimes as a landowner, his agent’s brutality, young Elsmere’s devotion, and the horrors of the Mile End outbreak, were in everybody’s mouths. The county was roused. The Radical newspaper came out on the Saturday with a flaming article; Robert, much to his annoyance, found himself the local hero; and money began to come in to him freely.

On the Monday morning Henslowe appeared on the scene with an army of workmen. A racy communica-

ROBERT ELSMERE

tion from the inspector had reached him two days before, so had a copy of the *Churton Advertiser*. He had spent Sunday in a drinking-bout, turning over all possible plans of vengeance and evasion. Towards the evening, however, his wife, a gaunt clever Scotchwoman, who saw ruin before them, and had on occasion an even sharper tongue than her husband, managed to capture the supplies of brandy in the house and effectually conceal them. Then she waited for the moment of collapse which came on towards morning, and with her hands on her hips she poured into him a volley of home-truths which not even Sir Harry Varley could have bettered. Henslowe's nerve gave way. He went out at daybreak, white and sullen, to look for workmen.

Robert, standing on the step of a cottage, watched him give his orders, and took vigilant note of their substance. They embodied the inspector's directions, and the rector was satisfied. Henslowe was obliged to pass him on his way to another group of houses. At first he affected not to see the rector, then suddenly Elsmere was conscious that the man's bloodshot eyes were on him. Such a look! If hate could have killed, Elsmere would have fallen where he stood. Yet the man's hand mechanically moved to his hat, as though the spell of his wife's harangue were still potent over his shaking muscles.

Robert took no notice whatever of the salutation. He stood calmly watching till Henslowe disappeared into the last house. Then he called one of the agent's train, heard what was to be done, gave a sharp nod of assent, and turned on his heel. So far so good: the

THE SQUIRE

servant had been made to feel, but he wished it had been the master. Oh, those three little emaciated creatures whose eyes he had closed, whose clammy hands he had held to the last! — what reckoning should be asked for their undeserved torments when the Great Account came to be made up?

Meanwhile not a sound apparently of all this reached the squire in the sublime solitude of Murewell. A fortnight had passed. Henslowe had been conquered, the county had rushed to Elsmere's help, and neither he nor Mrs. Darcy had made a sign. Their life was so abnormal that it was perfectly possible they had heard nothing. Elsmere wondered when they *would* hear.

The rector's chief help and support all through had been old Meyrick. The parish doctor had been in bed with rheumatism when the epidemic broke out, and Robert, feeling it a comfort to be rid of him, had thrown the whole business into the hands of Meyrick and his son. This son was nominally his father's junior partner, but as he was, besides, a young and brilliant M.D. fresh from a great hospital, and his father was just a poor old general practitioner, with the barest qualification, and only forty years' experience to recommend him, it will easily be imagined that the subordination was purely nominal. Indeed young Meyrick was fast ousting his father in all directions, and the neighbourhood, which had so far found itself unable either to enter or to quit this mortal scene without old Meyrick's assistance, was beginning to send notes to the house in Churton High Street, whereon the superscription '*Dr. Edward Meyrick*'

ROBERT ELSMERE

was underlined with ungrateful emphasis. The father took his deposition very quietly. Only on Murewell Hall would he allow no trespassing, and so long as his son left him undisturbed there, he took his effacement in other quarters with perfect meekness.

Young Elsmere's behaviour to him, however, at a time when all the rest of the Churton world was beginning to hold him cheap and let him see it, had touched the old man's heart, and he was the rector's slave in this Mile End business. Edward Meyrick would come whirling in and out of the hamlet once a day. Robert was seldom sorry to see the back of him. His attainments, of course, were useful, but his cocksureness was irritating, and his manner to his father abominable. The father, on the other hand, came over in the shabby pony-cart he had driven for the last forty years, and having himself no press of business, would spend hours with the rector over the cases, giving them an infinity of patient watching, and amusing Robert by the cautious hostility he would allow himself every now and then towards his son's new-fangled devices.

At first Meyrick showed himself fidgety as to the squire. Had he been seen, been heard from? He received Robert's sharp negatives with long sighs, but Robert clearly saw that, like the rest of the world, he was too much afraid of Mr. Wendover to go and beard him. Some months before, as it happened, Elsmere had told him the story of his encounter with the squire, and had been a good deal moved and surprised by the old man's concern.

One day, about three weeks from the beginning of the outbreak, when the state of things in the hamlet

THE SQUIRE

was beginning decidedly to mend, Meyrick arrived for his morning round, much preoccupied. He hurried his work a little, and after it was done asked Robert to walk up the road with him.

‘I have seen the squire, sir,’ he said, turning on his companion with a certain excitement.

Robert flushed.

‘Have you?’ he replied, with his hands behind him, and a world of expression in his sarcastic voice.

‘You misjudge him! You misjudge him, Mr. Elsmere!’ the old man said tremulously. ‘I told you he could know nothing of this business — and he did n’t! He has been in town part of the time, and down here — how is he to know anything? He sees nobody. That man Henslowe, sir, must be a real *bad* fellow.’

‘Don’t abuse the man,’ said Robert, looking up. ‘It’s not worth while, when you can say your mind of the master.’

Old Meyrick sighed.

‘Well,’ said Robert, after a moment, his lip drawn and quivering, ‘you told him the story, I suppose? Seven deaths, is it, by now? Well, what sort of impression did these unfortunate accidents’ — and he smiled — ‘produce?’

‘He talked of sending money,’ said Meyrick doubtfully; ‘he said he would have Henslowe up and inquire. He seemed put about and annoyed. Oh, Mr. Elsmere, you think too hardly of the squire, that you do!’

They strolled on together in silence. Robert was not inclined to discuss the matter. But old Meyrick seemed to be labouring under some suppressed emotion, and presently he began upon his own experiences,

ROBERT ELSMERE

as a doctor, of the Wendover family. He had already broached the subject more or less vaguely with Robert. Now, however, he threw his medical reserve, generally his strongest characteristic, to the winds. He insisted on telling his companion, who listened reluctantly, the whole miserable and ghastly story of the old squire's suicide. He described the heir's summons, his arrival just in time for the last scene with all its horrors, and that mysterious condition of the squire for some months afterwards, when no one, not even Mrs. Darcy, had been admitted to the Hall, and old Meyrick, directed at intervals by a great London doctor, had been the only spectator of Roger Wendover's physical and mental breakdown, the only witness of that dark consciousness of inherited fatality which at that period of his life not even the squire's iron will had been able wholly to conceal.

Robert, whose attention was inevitably roused after a while, found himself with some curiosity realising the squire from another man's totally different point of view. Evidently Meyrick had seen him at such moments as wring from the harshest nature whatever grains of tenderness, of pity, or of natural human weakness may be in it. And it was clear, too, that the squire, conscious perhaps of a shared secret, and feeling a certain soothing influence in the naïveté and simplicity of the old man's sympathy, had allowed himself at times, in the years succeeding that illness of his, an amount of unbending in Meyrick's presence, such as probably no other mortal had ever witnessed in him since his earliest youth.

And yet how childish the old man's whole mental

THE SQUIRE

image of the squire was after all! What small account it made of the subtleties, the gnarled intricacies and contradictions of such a character! Horror at his father's end, and dread of a like fate for himself! Robert did not know very much of the squire, but he knew enough to feel sure that this confiding indulgent theory of Meyrick's was ludicrously far from the mark as an adequate explanation of Mr. Wendover's later life.

Presently Meyrick became aware of the sort of tacit resistance which his companion's mind was opposing to his own. He dropped the wandering narrative he was busy upon with a sigh.

'Ah well, I dare say it's hard, it's hard,' he said with patient acquiescence in his voice, 'to believe a man can't help himself. I dare say we doctors get to muddle up right and wrong. But if ever there was a man sick in mind — for all his book-learning they talk about — and sick in soul, that man is the squire.'

Robert looked at him with a softer expression. There was a new dignity about the simple old man. The old-fashioned deference, which had never let him forget in speaking to Robert that he was speaking to a man of family, and which showed itself in all sorts of antiquated locutions which were a torment to his son, had given way to something still more deeply ingrained. His gaunt figure, with the stoop, and the spectacles and the long straight hair — like the figure of a superannuated schoolmaster — assumed, as he turned again to his younger companion, something of authority, something almost of stateliness.

'Ah, Mr. Elsmere,' he said, laying his shrunk hand

ROBERT ELSMERE

on the younger man's sleeve and speaking with emotion, 'you're very good to the poor. We're all proud of you — you and your good lady. But when you were coming, and I heard tell all about you, I thought of my poor squire, and I said to myself, "That young man 'll be good to *him*. The squire will make friends with him, and Mr. Elsmere will have a good wife, — and there'll be children born to him — and the squire will take an interest — and — and — maybe —"

The old man paused. Robert grasped his hand silently.

'And there was something in the way between you,' the speaker went on, sighing. 'I dare say you were quite right — quite right. I can't judge. Only there are ways of doing a thing. And it was a last chance; and now it's missed — it's missed. Ah! it's no good talking; he has a heart — he has! Many's the kind thing he's done in old days for me and mine — I'll never forget them! But all these last few years — oh, I know, I know. You can't go and shut your heart up, and fly in the face of all the duties the Lord laid on you, without losing yourself and setting the Lord against you. But it's pitiful, Mr. Elsmere, it's pitiful!'

It seemed to Robert suddenly as though there was a Divine breath passing through the wintry lane and through the shaking voice of the old man. Beside the spirit looking out of those wrinkled eyes, his own hot youth, its justest resentments, its most righteous angers, seemed crude, harsh, inexcusable.

'Thank you, Meyrick, thank you, and God bless you! Don't imagine I will forget a word you have said to me.'

THE SQUIRE

The rector shook the hand he held warmly twice over, a gentle smile passed over Meyrick's ageing face, and they parted.

That night it fell to Robert to sit up after midnight with John Allwood, the youth of twenty whose case had been a severer tax on the powers of the little nursing staff than perhaps any other. Mother and neighbours were worn out, and it was difficult to spare a hospital nurse for long together from the diphtheria cases. Robert, therefore, had insisted during the preceding week on taking alternate nights with one of the nurses. During the first hours before midnight he slept soundly on a bed made up in the ground-floor room of the little sanatorium. Then at twelve the nurse called him, and he went out, his eyes still heavy with sleep, into a still frosty winter's night.

After so much rain, so much restlessness of wind and cloud, the silence and the starry calm of it were infinitely welcome. The sharp cold air cleared his brain and braced his nerves, and by the time he reached the cottage whither he was bound, he was broad awake. He opened the door softly, passed through the lower room, crowded with sleeping children, climbed the narrow stairs as noiselessly as possible, and found himself in a garret, faintly lit, a bed in one corner and a woman sitting beside it. The woman glided away, the rector looked carefully at the table of instructions hanging over the bed, assured himself that wine and milk and beef essence and medicines were ready to his hand, put out his watch on the wooden table near the bed, and sat him down to his task. The boy was sleeping the sleep of weakness. Food was to be given every

half-hour, and in this perpetual impulse to the system lay his only chance.

The rector had his Greek Testament with him, and could just read it by the help of the dim light. But after a while, as the still hours passed on, it dropped on to his knee, and he sat thinking — endlessly thinking. The young labourer lay motionless beside him, the lines of the long emaciated frame showing through the bed-clothes. The night-light flickered on the broken discoloured ceiling; every now and then a mouse scratched in the plaster; the mother's heavy breathing came from the next room; sometimes a dog barked or an owl cried outside. Otherwise deep silence, such silence as drives the soul back upon itself.

Elsmere was conscious of a strange sense of moral expansion. The stern judgements, the passionate condemnations which his nature housed so painfully, seemed lifted from it. The soul breathed an 'ampler æther, a diviner air.' Oh! the mysteries of life and character, the subtle inexhaustible claims of pity! The problems which hang upon our being here; its mixture of elements; the pressure of its inexorable physical environment; the relations of mind to body, of man's poor will to this tangled tyrannous life — it was along these old, old lines his thought went painfully groping; and always at intervals it came back to the squire, pondering, seeking to understand, a new soberness, a new humility and patience entering in.

And yet it was not Meyrick's facts exactly that had brought this about. Robert thought them imperfect, only half true. Rather was it the spirit of love, of infinite forbearance in which the simpler, duller nature

THE SQUIRE

had declared itself that had appealed to him, nay, reproached him.

Then these thoughts led him on farther and farther from man to God, from human defect to the Eternal Perfectness. Never once during those hours did Elsmere's hand fail to perform its needed service to the faint sleeper beside him, and yet that night was one long dream and strangeness to him, nothing real anywhere but consciousness, and God its source; the soul attacked every now and then by phantom stabs of doubt, of bitter brief misgiving, as the barriers of sense between it and the eternal enigma grew more and more transparent, wrestling a while, and then prevailing. And each golden moment of certainty, of conquering faith, seemed to Robert in some sort a gift from Catherine's hand. It was she who led him through the shades; it was her voice murmuring in his ear.

When the first grey dawn began to creep in slowly perceptible waves into the room, Elsmere felt as though not hours but years of experience lay between him and the beginnings of his watch.

'It is by these moments we should date our lives,' he murmured to himself as he rose; 'they are the only real landmarks.'

It was eight o'clock, and the nurse who was to relieve him had come. The results of the night for his charge were good: the strength had been maintained, the pulse was firmer, the temperature lower. The boy, throwing off his drowsiness, lay watching the rector's face as he talked in an undertone to the nurse, his haggard eyes full of a dumb friendly wistfulness. When Robert bent over him to say good-bye, this

ROBERT ELSMERE

expression brightened into something more positive, and Robert left him, feeling at last that there was a promise of life in his look and touch.

In another moment he had stepped out into the January morning. It was clear and still as the night had been. In the east there was a pale promise of sun; the reddish-brown trunks of the fir woods had just caught it, and rose faintly glowing in endless vistas and colonnades one behind the other. The flooded river itself rushed through the bridge as full and turbid as before, but all the other water surfaces had gleaming films of ice. The whole ruinous place had a clean, almost a festal air under the touch of the frost, while on the side of the hill leading to Murewell, tree rose above tree, the delicate network of their wintry twigs and branches set against stretches of frost-whitened grass, till finally they climbed into the pale all-completing blue. In a copse close at hand there were woodcutters at work, and piles of gleaming laths shining through the underwood. Robins hopped along the frosty road, and as he walked on through the houses towards the bridge, Robert's quick ear distinguished that most wintry of all sounds — the cry of a flock of fieldfares passing overhead.

As he neared the bridge he suddenly caught sight of a figure upon it, the figure of a man wrapped in a large Inverness cloak, leaning against the stone parapet. With a start he recognised the squire.

He went up to him without an instant's slackening of his steady step. The squire heard the sound of some one coming, turned, and saw the rector.

'I am glad to see you here, Mr. Wendover,' said

THE SQUIRE

Robert, stopping and holding out his hand. 'I meant to have come to talk to you about this place this morning. I ought to have come before.'

He spoke gently, and quite simply, almost as if they had parted the day before. The squire touched his hand for an instant.

'You may not, perhaps, be aware, Mr. Elsmere,' he said, endeavouring to speak with all his old hauteur, while his heavy lips twitched nervously, 'that, for one reason and another, I knew nothing of the epidemic here till yesterday, when Meyrick told me.'

'I heard from Mr. Meyrick that it was so. As you are here now, Mr. Wendover, and I am in no great hurry to get home, may I take you through and show you the people?'

The squire at last looked at him straight — at the face worn and pale, yet still so extraordinarily youthful, in which something of the solemnity and high emotion of the night seemed to be still lingering.

'Are you just come?' he said abruptly, 'or are you going back?'

'I have been here through the night, sitting up with one of the fever cases. It's hard work for the nurses, and the relations sometimes, without help.'

The squire moved on mechanically towards the village, and Robert moved beside him.

'And Mrs. Elsmere?'

'Mrs. Elsmere was here most of yesterday. She used to stay the night when the diphtheria was at its worst; but there are only four anxious cases left — the rest all convalescent.'

The squire said no more, and they turned into the

ROBERT ELSMERE

lane, where the ice lay thick in the deep ruts, and on either hand curls of smoke rose into the clear cold sky. The squire looked about him with eyes which no detail escaped. Robert, without a word of comment, pointed out this feature and that, showed where Henslowe had begun repairs, where the new well was to be, what the water-supply had been till now, drew the squire's attention to the roofs, the pig-styes, the drainage, or rather complete absence of drainage, and all in the dry voice of some one going through a catalogue. Word had already fled like wildfire through the hamlet that the squire was there. Children and adults, a pale emaciated crew, poured out into the wintry air to look. The squire knit his brows with annoyance as the little crowd in the lane grew. Robert took no notice.

Presently he pushed open the door of the house where he had spent the night. In the kitchen a girl of sixteen was clearing away the various nondescript heaps on which the family had slept, and was preparing breakfast. The squire looked at the floor.

'I thought I understood from Henslowe,' he muttered, as though to himself, 'that there were no mud floors left on the estate —'

'There are only three houses in Mile End without them,' said Robert, catching what he said.

They went upstairs, and the mother stood open-eyed while the squire's restless look gathered in the details of the room, the youth's face, as he lay back on his pillows, whiter than they, exhausted and yet refreshed by the sponging with vinegar and water which the mother had just been administering to him; the bed,

THE SQUIRE

the gaps in the worm-eaten boards, the spots in the roof where the plaster bulged inward, as though a shake would bring it down ; the coarse china shepherdesses on the mantel-shelf, and the flowers which Catherine had put there the day before. He asked a few questions, said an abrupt word or two to the mother, and they tramped downstairs again and into the street. Then Robert took him across to the little improvised hospital, saying to him on the threshold, with a moment's hesitation, —

‘As you know, for adults there is not much risk, but there is always some risk —’

A peremptory movement of the squire's hand stopped him, and they went in. In the downstairs room were half a dozen convalescents, pale, shadowy creatures, four of them under ten, sitting up in their little cots, each of them with a red flannel jacket drawn from Lady Helen's stores, and enjoying the breakfast which a nurse in white cap and apron had just brought them. Upstairs, in a room from which a lath-and-plaster partition had been removed, and which had been adapted, warmed, and ventilated by various contrivances to which Robert and Meyrick had devoted their practical minds, were the ‘four anxious cases.’ One of them, a little creature of six, one of Sharland's black-eyed children, was sitting up, supported by the nurse, and coughing its little life away. As soon as he saw it, Robert's step quickened. He forgot the squire altogether. He came and stood by the bedside, rigidly still, for he could do nothing, but his whole soul absorbed in that horrible struggle for air. How often he had seen it now, and never with-

ROBERT ELSMERE

out the same wild sense of revolt and protest! At last the hideous membrane was loosened, the child got relief, and lay back white and corpse-like, but with a pitiful momentary relaxation of the drawn lines on its little brow. Robert stooped and kissed the damp tiny hand. The child's eyes remained shut, but the fingers made a feeble effort to close on his.

'Mr. Elsmere,' said the nurse, a motherly body, looking at him with friendly admonition, 'if you don't go home and rest you'll be ill too, and I'd like to know who'll be the better for that?'

'How many deaths?' asked the squire abruptly, touching Elsmere's arm, and so reminding Robert of his existence. 'Meyrick spoke of deaths.'

He stood near the door, but his eyes were fixed on the little bed, on the half-swooning child.

'Seven,' said Robert, turning upon him. 'Five of diphtheria, two of fever. That little one will go too.'

'Horrible!' said the squire under his breath, and then moved to the door.

The two men went downstairs in perfect silence. Below, in the convalescent room, the children were capable of smiles, and of quick coquettish beckonings to the rector to come and make game with them as usual. But he could only kiss his hand to them and escape, for there was more to do.

He took the squire through all the remaining fever cases, and into several of the worst cottages — Mil-som's among them — and when it was all over they emerged into the lane again, near the bridge. There was still a crowd of children and women hanging about, watching eagerly for the squire, whom many

THE SQUIRE

of them had never seen at all, and about whom various myths had gradually formed themselves in the countryside. The squire walked away from them hurriedly, followed by Robert, and again they halted on the centre of the bridge. A horse led by a groom was being walked up and down on a flat piece of road just beyond.

It was an awkward moment. Robert never forgot the thrill of it, or the association of wintry sunshine streaming down upon a sparkling world of ice and delicate woodland and foam-flecked river.

The squire turned towards him irresolutely; his sharply-cut wrinkled lips opening and closing again. Then he held out his hand: 'Mr. Elsmere, I did you a wrong — I did this place and its people a wrong. In my view, regret for the past is useless. Much of what has occurred here is plainly irreparable; I will think what can be done for the future. As for my relation to you, it rests with you to say whether it can be amended. I recognise that you have just cause of complaint.'

'What invincible pride there was in the man's very surrender! But Elsmere was not repelled by it. He knew that in their hour together the squire had *felt*. His soul had lost its bitterness. The dead and their wrong were with God.

He took the squire's outstretched hand, grasping it cordially, a pure unworldly dignity in his whole look and bearing.

'Let us be friends, Mr. Wendover. It will be a great comfort to us — my wife and me. Will you remember us both very kindly to Mrs. Darcy?'

Commonplace words, but words that made an epoch

ROBERT ELSMERE

in the life of both. In another minute the squire, on horseback, was trotting along the side-road leading to the Hall, and Robert was speeding home to Catherine as fast as his long legs could carry him.

She was waiting for him on the steps, shading her eyes against the unwonted sun. He kissed her with the spirits of a boy and told her all his news.

Catherine listened bewildered, not knowing what to say or how all at once to forgive, to join Robert in forgetting. But that strange spiritual glow about him was not to be withstood. She threw her arms about him at last with a half-sob, —

‘Oh, Robert — yes! Dear Robert — thank God!’

‘Never think any more,’ he said at last, leading her in from the little hall, ‘of what has been, only of what shall be! Oh, Catherine, give me some tea; and never did I see anything so tempting as that armchair.’

He sank down into it, and when she put his breakfast beside him she saw with a start that he was fast asleep. The wife stood and watched him, the signs of fatigue round eyes and mouth, the placid expression, and her face was soft with tenderness and joy. ‘Of course — of course, even that hard man must love him. Who could help it? My Robert!’

And so now in this disguise, now in that, the supreme hour of Catherine’s life stole on and on towards her.

END OF VOLUME I

The Riverside Press
CAMBRIDGE . MASSACHUSETTS
U . S . A

